

IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE

FINDINGS FROM
SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING
RESTORATIVE PRACTICES



PHOTO: © RONNIE ANDREN

A Report from the
*International Institute
for Restorative Practices*
Graduate School

Table of Contents

Preface	3
Foreword	4
U.S. Schools	
West Philadelphia High School	6
Pottstown High School	9
Newtown Middle School	11
Palisades High School	14
Palisades Middle School	17
Springfield Township High School	19
Canadian & British Schools	
Kawartha Pine Ridge District, Ontario, Canada	22
Keewatin-Patricia District, Ontario, Canada	25
Bessels Leigh School, Oxfordshire, England, UK	27
Hull, England, UK — Schools in a Restorative City	29
References	32
Appendix	
“The Talk-It-Out Solution” by Caralee Adams From <i>Scholastic Administrator</i> magazine, Nov/Dec 2008	33
Community Service Foundation & Buxmont Academy Restorative Programs for Delinquent and At-Risk Youth.....	35

PREFACE

I was first introduced to restorative practices through a good friend. He could not stop talking about this program that worked with adults and students to change the climate of schools. As I continued to press him for data, he fed me a collection of websites and pages of summary data. The research was promising, but I wanted to know more. I decided to visit the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

My passion has always been urban education. As a former high school teacher, assistant superintendent for research and school reform in Detroit Public Schools, and research director for the Council of the Great City Schools, I have always focused on improving the quality of education in urban schools. Therefore, my review of restorative practices was through an urban lens.

When I met Ted Wachtel, president and founder of the IIRP Graduate School, I was pleased to learn that the IIRP Training and Consulting Division was working with challenging urban schools in several cities and was committed to developing a more comprehensive research effort. I agreed to assist the IIRP in that effort and suggested that we start by producing a compilation of existing data. The very recent data provided by West Philadelphia High School constitutes the first case presented in this report.

I have always recognized that safe schools are prerequisite to academic rigor. Zero tolerance has been the rule of the land in most schools for some time. But there have not been significant reductions in fights, disruptive behavior or other violent acts in schools as a result of those policies. On the other hand, there is growing evidence that restorative practices, with its roots in restorative justice (from the criminal justice system), can improve the culture and climate of all schools: rural, suburban and urban.

Improving School Climate: Findings from Schools Implementing Restorative Practices is composed of excerpts from articles, reports and disciplinary data from individual schools and school districts. These data were collected to provide the reader with a snapshot of findings related to restorative practices. It is important to note that most schools implementing these practices have not conducted formal research studies. Hence, the types of data reported may be different from one school or district to the next and may not have been consistently collected over a set of years. However, taken together and “in their own words,” it is clear that restorative practices is having a positive effect on the lives of many students and is changing the climate of many schools.

The IIRP is committed to providing ongoing data about how these practices are being implemented in a representative sample of schools and school districts. The first portion of this document contains data from six schools in the United States; the second section reports on four international cases. The appendix includes a *Scholastic Administrator* magazine article about restorative practices in schools and a summary of research from the CSF Buxmont programs for delinquent and at-risk youth where the IIRP first developed its restorative methodology.

This is my first attempt at collecting and organizing the data. I am looking forward to working closely with schools and the IIRP as we continue to document our successes.

Sharon Lewis
Director of Research
IIRP Graduate School

FOREWORD

The emerging new field of study, restorative practices, has the potential to transform our schools and our communities. It includes but goes beyond restorative justice, an innovative criminal justice system response to wrongdoing. Restorative practices, however, are both proactive and reactive, ranging from relationship and community-building activities to effective processes for dealing with disruptive student behavior and violence. When systematically employed on a whole-school basis, restorative practices transform negative school environments by engaging students in taking responsibility for making their own schools better. Restorative practices stands in stark contrast to the prevailing reliance on punishment employed in today's schools.

While restorative practices works well in both school and criminal justice settings, the ultimate implementation of restorative practices is demonstrated in our work with Hull, labeled the worst place to live in the UK by the BBC in 2005. In Hull, a city of a quarter million, the IIRP is helping to build the world's first restorative city by training over 23,000 people. The unique cross-service implementation model has enabled children, young people, parents, educators, social workers, caregivers, police and youth justice professionals to adopt a unified set of practices that enhance personal well-being, promote appropriate behaviors and, crucially, strengthen acceptance of responsibility. We have included the remarkable outcomes from Hull in this report.

I am grateful to all of those who provided us with the data presented in this report, which highlights the remarkable potential of restorative practices to achieve safer, saner schools and communities.

Ted Wachtel
President
IIRP Graduate School

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

U.S. SCHOOLS



www.iirp.edu

West Philadelphia High School

4700 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19139

West Philadelphia High School, widely known as one of Philadelphia's most dangerous and high-risk schools, on the state's "Persistently Dangerous Schools" list for six years running, is seeing positive results with restorative practices less than one school year into implementation.

Administrators at West Philadelphia High School learned about restorative practices in spring 2008 and began implementing the practices immediately, using circles in some classrooms. The school had its first formal restorative practices training in fall 2008. From April to December 2008, suspensions decreased by half and recidivism plummeted. The school's administrators credit restorative practices for these improvements.

"Restorative practices is what you need in an urban environment, because you have students who have so many social concerns, so many things that get in the way of learning. Restorative practices has given us a way to help the kids process the things in the front of their minds that make learning secondary to them.

"In the classroom, it's about getting to a state where we can work, rather than seeing how much punishment we can heap on a student. The more kids understand that, the more they're willing to own their actions and become productive members of their class. This is different from the model that says, 'You're going to get a detention and a suspension, whether it's going to help you or not,' over and over and over again. Now the kids have the authority to make their own corrections.

"We didn't really believe that we could get our kids to the point where they could express remorse, sympathy and respect. Now the kids have embraced restorative practices even more than the adults."

—Saliyah Cruz, principal

"Before implementing restorative practices, we had a lot of issues of violence, fires, kids misbehaving in class, disrespect. What restorative practices does is change the emotional atmosphere of the school. You can stop guns, but you can't stop them from bringing fists or a poor attitude. A metal detector won't detect that."

—Russell Gallagher, assistant principal

"The PFT [Philadelphia Federation of Teachers] should encourage the use of restorative practices and support it in schools. It's not just another new thing on the block. It's a way of life."

—Marsha A. Walker, teacher and PFT building committee member

"Restorative practices can work in tough urban schools. It doesn't get any tougher than West Philadelphia High School."

—Lt. Colonel James Cotton, officer and teacher, Air Force Junior ROTC

Source: Caralee Adams, *Scholastic Administrator* magazine, November/December 2008 (see Appendix); International Institute for Restorative Practices, "Safer Saner Urban Schools: The Story of West Philadelphia High," www.iirp.edu/westphilahigh

West Philadelphia High School Characteristics

Large City High School

2007–2008

GRADES 9–12

913 Students*

- › 98% African American
- › 84% Eligible to Receive Free/Reduced-Price Lunch
- › 27% Special Needs

*as of 2008–2009

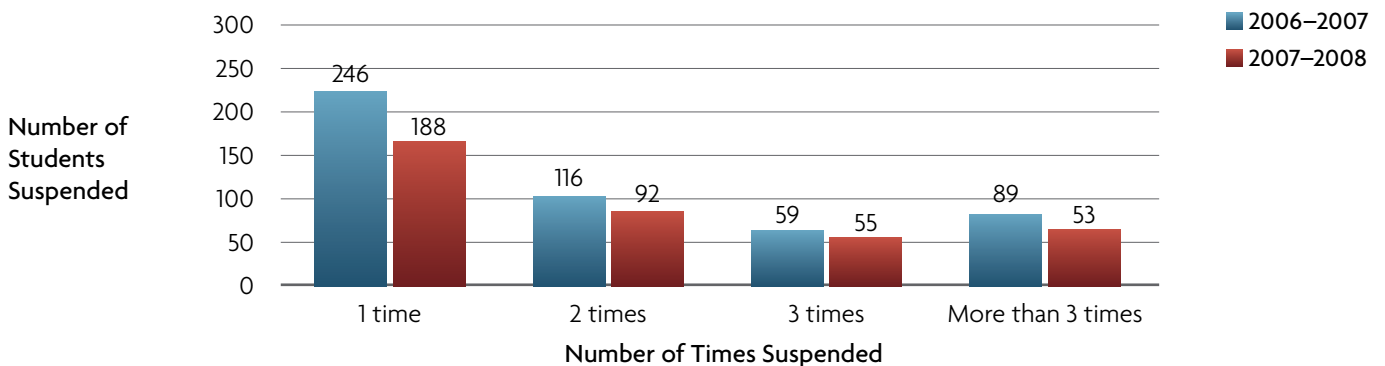
Source: Russell A. Gallagher, assistant principal, West Philadelphia High School, February 2009

West Philadelphia High School Data

- › Violent acts and serious incidents were down 52% in 2007–2008 compared to 2006–2007.
- › Violent acts and serious incidents were down an additional 40% for 2008–2009 (through December 2008).
- › In school year 2007–2008, there were only two fire-alarm pulls and two “limited responses” (i.e., two very small pieces of paper were set on fire).

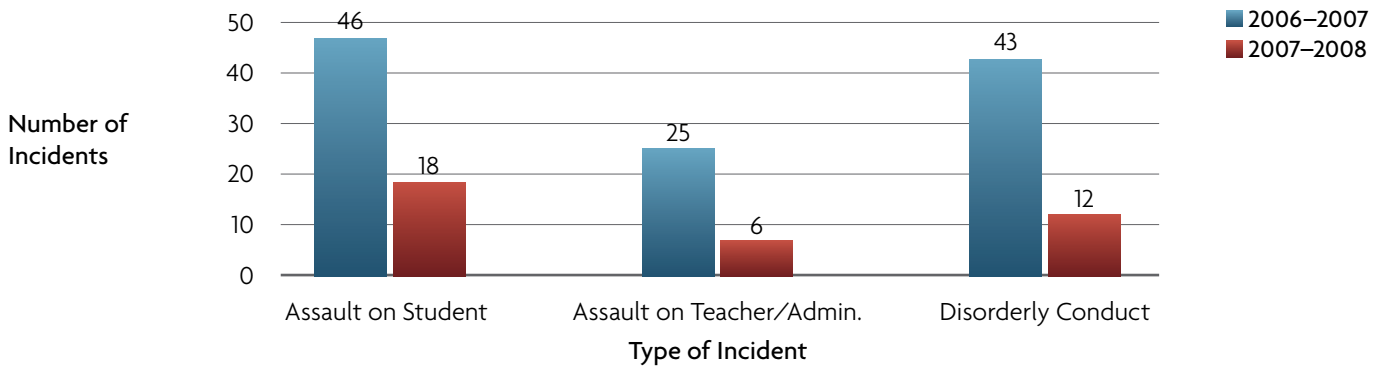
Number of Students Suspended in 2 School Years

N=941



Serious Behavioral Incidents by Type in 2 School Years

N=941



Source: Russell A. Gallagher, assistant principal, West Philadelphia High School, February 2009

Pottstown High School

750 N. Washington St., Pottstown, Pennsylvania 19464

Pottstown, once a thriving working-class town, fell on hard times when its manufacturing industries dried up. Poverty turned Pottstown into a small town with big-city problems, a circumstance exacerbated by an influx of transplants from urban areas.

Pottstown High School was struggling badly, had been placed on academic probation and was in danger of being taken over by the state when Stephen J. Rodriguez became the school's principal in fall 2005. Besides poor academic performance, the school was experiencing cultural problems, with students divided into factions and staff disillusioned and at odds. "We had a lot of issues: a lack of community spirit, disrespect to teachers, cutting classes, classroom disruption, physical fights," said Rodriguez, adding, "The teachers wanted to drop the hammer and punish harder. I thought we needed a schoolwide approach. I wanted everybody to speak the same language and be on the same page."

Rodriguez pursued restorative practices implementation vigorously beginning in fall 2006. He began by sending an assortment of 10 enthusiastic, neutral and resistant teachers to a restorative conferencing training at the IIRP in Bethlehem. All came back "totally energized" about the potential for restorative practices at Pottstown. They quickly tried a conference with one of the most "hard-core" girls in the school, who "was in tears within minutes" after having the opportunity to tell her story, as well as hear how her behavior affected others. She has been much better behaved since.

The entire school staff has now been trained, including teachers, counselors and instructional aides. Every educator is now required to use restorative practices in some way. The school has been removed from academic probation, student test scores and behavior have improved greatly, and staff are united and inspired in their work.

"There has been a significant reduction in discipline problems, disrespect and fighting, and students are more accountable," said Rodriguez. "Teachers used to be afraid to deal with students in the hallways; they felt that students had the advantage there. And students felt that staff were like police." Now, said Rodriguez, "There's no more feeling of 'us versus them.' Staff and kids are all one team."

Source: Stephen J. Rodriguez, principal, Pottstown High School, February 2009

Pottstown High School Characteristics

Small Suburban High School

GRADES 9–12

63 Teachers

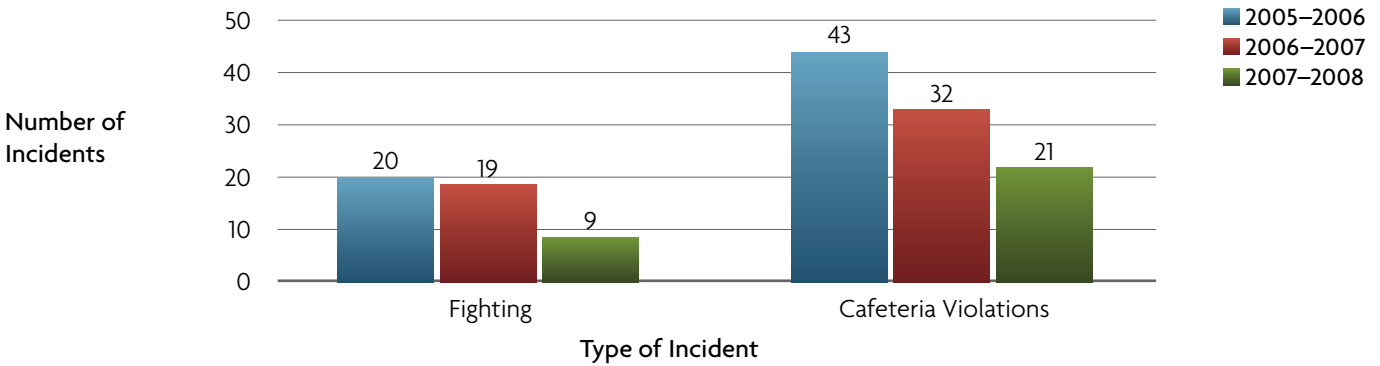
874 Students

- › Grade 9: 278
- › Grade 10: 230
- › Grade 11: 202
- › Grade 12: 164

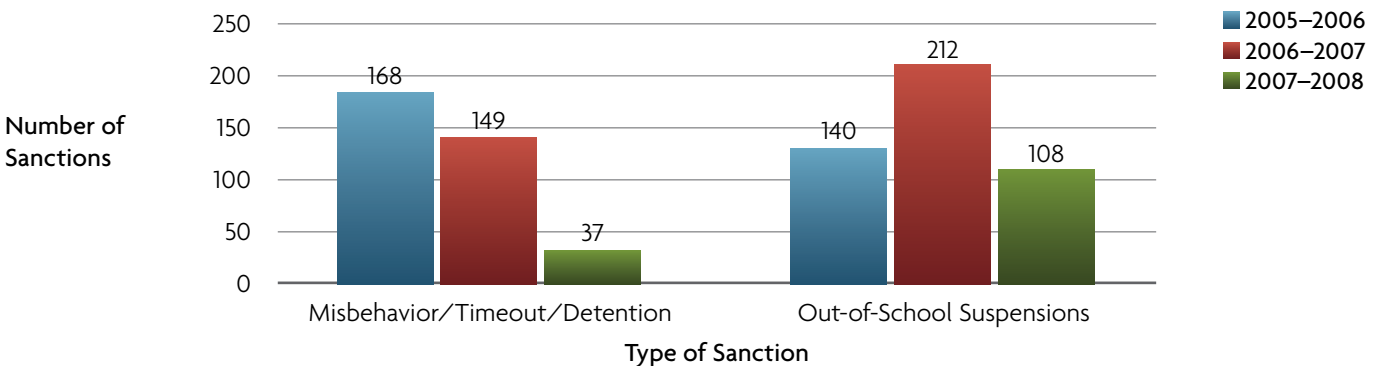
Source: *NCES Kids' Zone*, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

Pottstown High School Data

Behavioral Incidents by Type in 3 School Years



Disciplinary Sanctions by Type in 3 School Years



Source: *Stephen J. Rodriguez, principal, Pottstown High School*, February 2009

Newtown Middle School

116 Richboro Rd., Newtown, Pennsylvania 18940

Relatively affluent Newtown Middle School first learned about restorative practices in 2003 when then–assistant principal Richard Hollahan received a training flier from the IIRP’s SaferSanerSchools program. He was intrigued by the potential of restorative practices to deal with the school’s “frequent fliers” — students who were repeatedly sent to his office for fighting, disrespect to teachers and other behavioral issues.

Hollahan’s first IIRP restorative practices training was in how to facilitate a restorative conference (which brings together victims, offenders and their supporters to repair the harm of wrongdoing or crime), a process he felt was too complex to use all the time in school. He was especially intrigued by the restorative questions, which are used to respond to challenging behavior and to help those harmed by others’ actions, and he began using them with students right away.

“Restorative practices changed the way I view discipline,” said Hollahan. “As an assistant principal my task was to assign blame and levy a penalty. That didn’t sit well anymore. The goal is for students not to repeat misbehavior. Now I see my task as helping them, and it’s done through building relationships.”

Newtown’s staff was trained in 2006, after Hollahan had begun spreading restorative practices throughout his building. “Restorative practices has changed the feeling and culture here. Now it’s like a family setting. Everyone asks for help and helps others. This has come about through a conscious effort on our part to build community.”

Discipline problems have all but disappeared. “Out of 900 kids we suspended only five this year. We used to have two days a week of detention, now we have only one. This has been a financial boon,” said Hollahan. “It’s a shame not to do this. It’s the right thing to do. Our school is no different than any other. Kids are far more likely to behave due to relationships than out of fear. And that’s the same at school as it is at home.”

Newtown is now participating in the IIRP’s Training of Trainers program, which helps selected school staff train new staff in restorative practices. More schools in the Council Rock School District are implementing restorative practices, and others in the Newtown area are paying attention as well. “The police department has a Youth Aid Panel [for first-time offenders], but all they were doing was handing out punishments,” said Hollahan. “They visited the school and were blown away by the restorative process, and they’ve started implementing it, too.”

Source: *Richard J. Hollahan, principal, Newtown Middle School, February 2009*

Newtown Middle School Characteristics

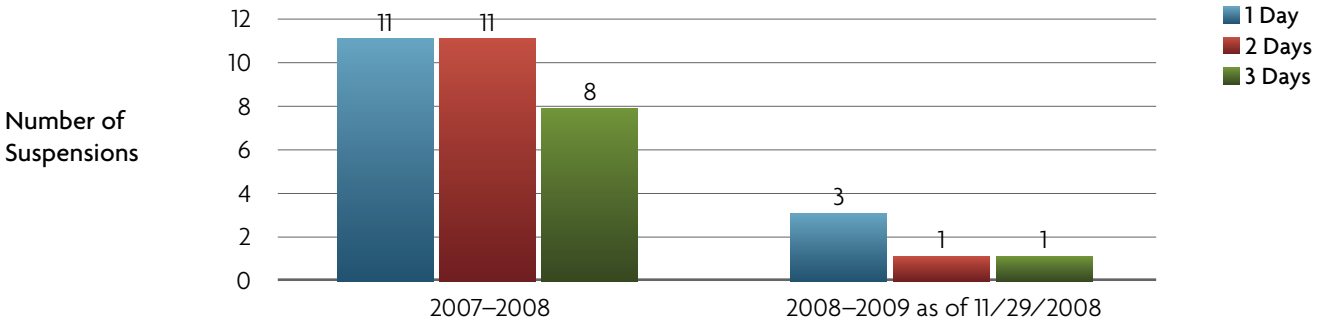
Large Suburban Middle School
 GRADES 7–8
 52 Teachers
 861 Students

- › Grade 7: 437
- › Grade 8: 424

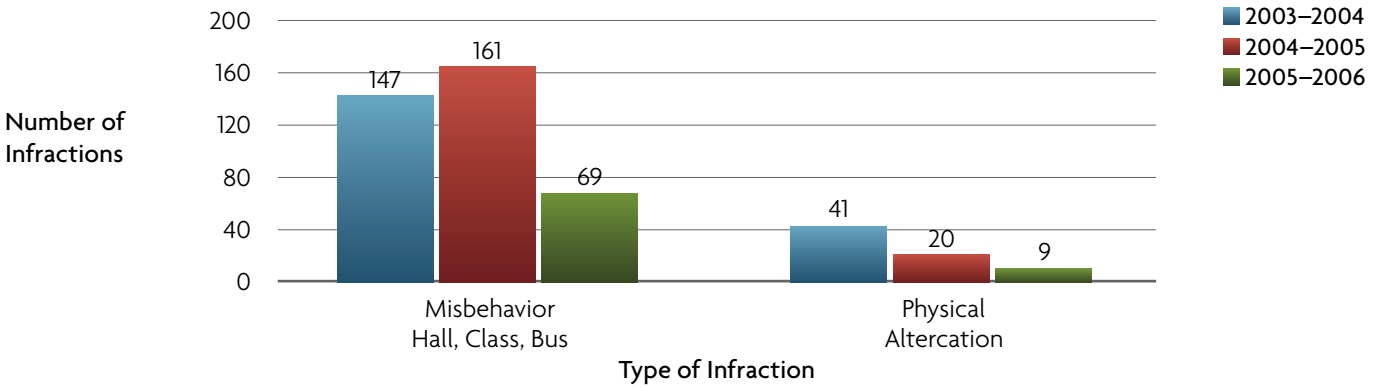
Source: *NCES Kids' Zone*, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

Newtown Middle School Data

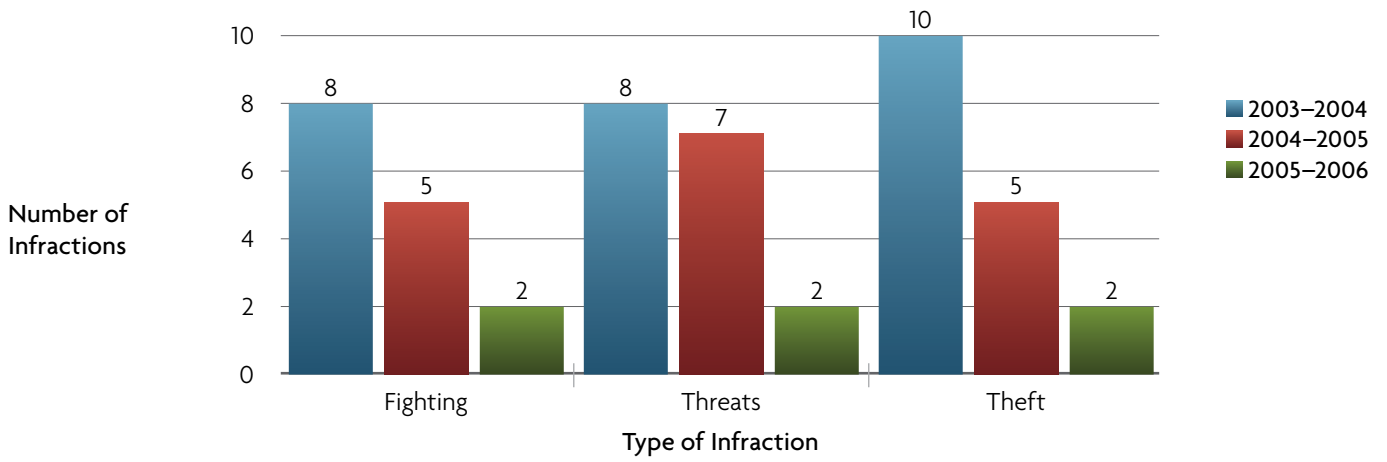
Student Suspensions in 2 School Years by Days of Suspension



Disciplinary Infractions by Type in 3 School Years (part 1)



Disciplinary Infractions by Type in 3 School Years (part 2)



Source: Richard J. Hollahan, principal, Newtown Middle School, February 2009

Palisades High School

35 Church Hill Rd., Kintnersville, Pennsylvania 18930

Palisades High School was the first International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) SaferSanerSchools pilot school. Restorative practices was introduced in the 1998–1999 school year. David Piperato, former Palisades H.S. principal, said that before the program was introduced, as in many public schools throughout the U.S., the level of caring and respect among many students had declined. Restorative practices, he said, “created a more positive relationship between staff and students.”

In fall 1998, the school launched a new program, the Academy, for students who didn’t feel connected to school and were struggling with behavior or academics. Said Piperato, “We had addressed the content of the program, not relationships between teachers and students.” Consequently, the program was a disaster. Rebelling against the lack of structure, unmotivated kids roamed the building, their behavior rude and belligerent. Teachers turned on each other, frustrated and upset.

The IIRP taught the Academy staff to employ the continuum of restorative practices, starting with affective statements and questions — sharing and eliciting emotions — to help students understand that they were as responsible for the success of the Academy, as well as to and for each other, as the teachers were. The teachers learned how to use circles, interventions, one-on-ones and group meetings with students. They introduced “check-in” and “check-out” circles at the beginning and end of each class — for students to set goals and expectations together.

The strategies quickly started to show results with Academy students, even those no one had been able to reach before. The administration decided to phase in restorative practices in the rest of the school over a three-year period. All teachers were encouraged to use restorative practices in the classroom. Data gathered by the school indicate a clear decrease in discipline problems.

Restorative practices had a positive effect on academic performance as well. Said Piperato, “You cannot separate behavior from academics. When students feel good and safe and have solid relationships with teachers, their academic performance improves.”

Restorative practices also helped establish a culture of collaboration among staff members, where teachers discuss students’ behavior, rather than their personalities, and brainstorm as a group about how to handle it. Said Academy teacher John Venner, “You never talked to another teacher about how they talked to kids. It was their own damn business in their own classroom. Now we find it very acceptable to hold each other accountable.”

Source: Laura Mirsky, “SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Practices,” *Restorative Practices eForum*, May 20, 2003, www.iirp.edu/library/ssspilots.html

Palisades High School Characteristics

Rural Fringe High School

GRADES 9–12

52 Teachers

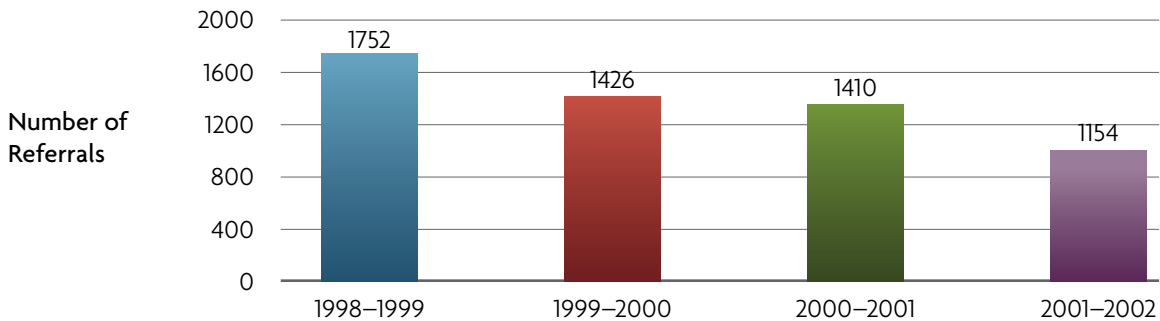
743 Students

- › Grade 9: 175
- › Grade 10: 198
- › Grade 11: 205
- › Grade 12: 165

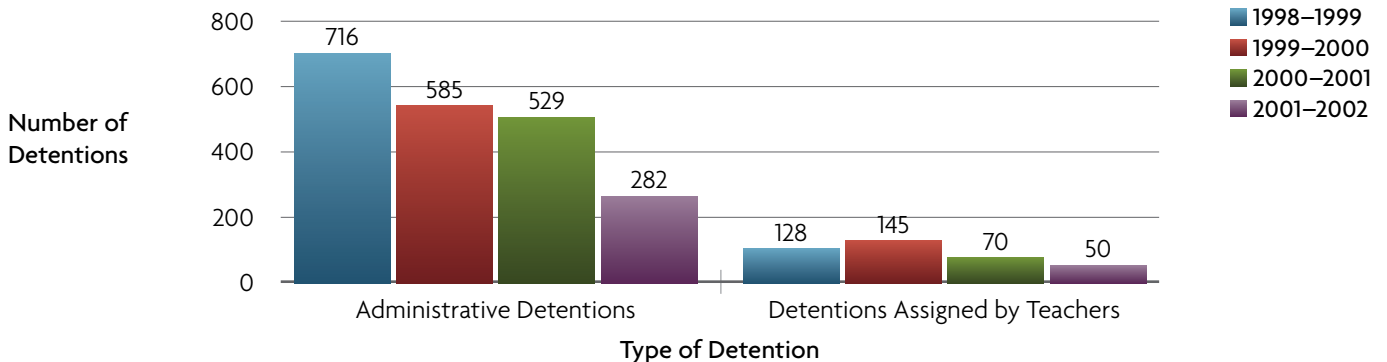
Source: NCES Kids' Zone, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

Palisades High School Data

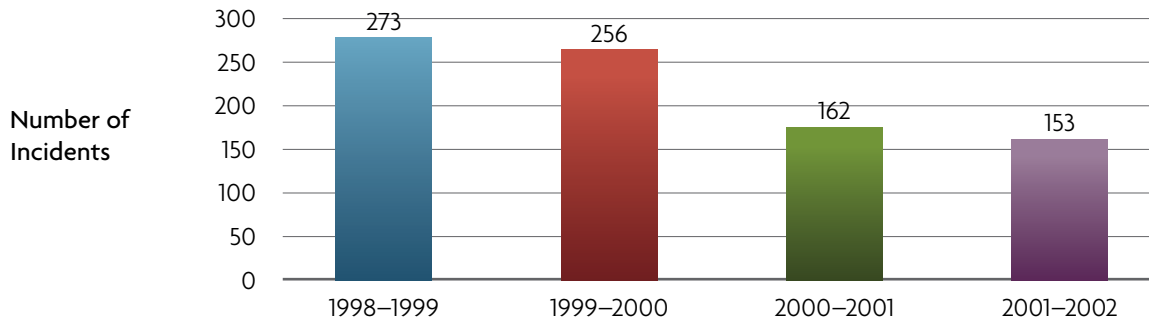
Disciplinary Referrals to Student Office in 4 School Years



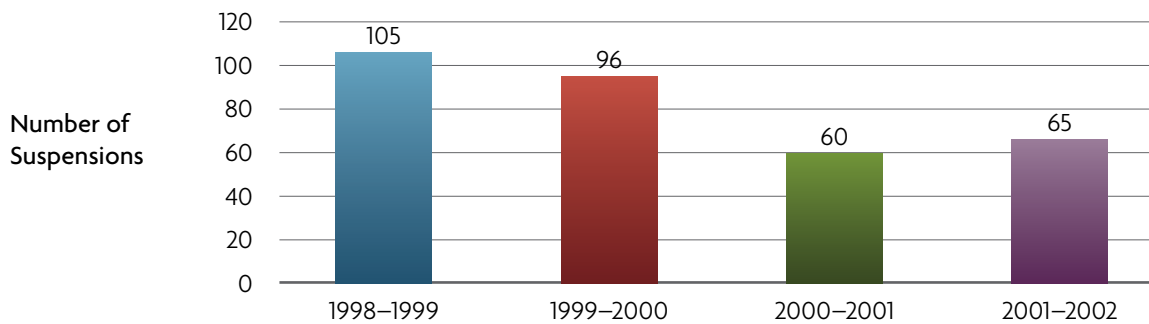
Student Detentions by Type in 4 School Years



Disruptive Behavior in 4 School Years



Out-of-School Suspensions in 4 School Years



Source: Laura Mirsky, "SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Practices," *Restorative Practices eForum*, May 20, 2003, www.iirp.edu/library/ssspilots.html

Palisades Middle School

4710 Durham Rd., Kintnersville, Pennsylvania 18930

Restorative practices was introduced at Palisades Middle School (PALMS) in fall 2000. Previously the school climate was discourteous and disrespectful and altercations were common. PALMS principal Edward Baumgartner said, “We were suspending 200 students a school year for everything from disrespect to not making up gym.” All staff were trained in restorative practices, including support staff.

Restorative practices is used in classrooms in the form of circles, where students and staff share information and problems. In discipline situations, students write in their personal journals, kept in the student office, about what happened and suggest how to take care of it. The entire continuum of restorative practices is also employed, from affective statements and questions to formal restorative conferences.

The school has seen a statistically significant decrease in the amount of problems that occur each day. Data gathered by PALMS indicate a substantial drop from school year 2000–2001 to 2001–2002 in discipline problems and incidents of fighting. Restorative practices has also had a positive effect on academic performance, said Baumgartner.

“I’ve gotten more out of my students with this approach than I did with a more rigid approach to discipline problems. When you solve problems with them rather than coming down from ‘on high’ they buy into it much better.”

— Fran Ostrosky, longtime PALMS teacher and president of the Palisades Education Association (teachers’ union)

“I used to get in a lot of trouble, but teachers talk to students and help you make the right decisions here. In homeroom we sit in a circle and talk about anything that needs to be brought up.”

—Eighth-grade girl

“I used to be one of these black and white, law and order guys. Kids had to be held accountable and the only way to do that was to kick them out of school — to show the other kids that you’re the boss. That doesn’t work. I didn’t solve problems; I just postponed them until they got to high school. Restorative practices works. We now fix and solve problems.”

—Edward Baumgartner, principal

Source: Laura Mirsky, “SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Practices,” *Restorative Practices eForum*, May 20, 2003, www.iirp.edu/library/ssspilots.html

Palisades Middle School Characteristics

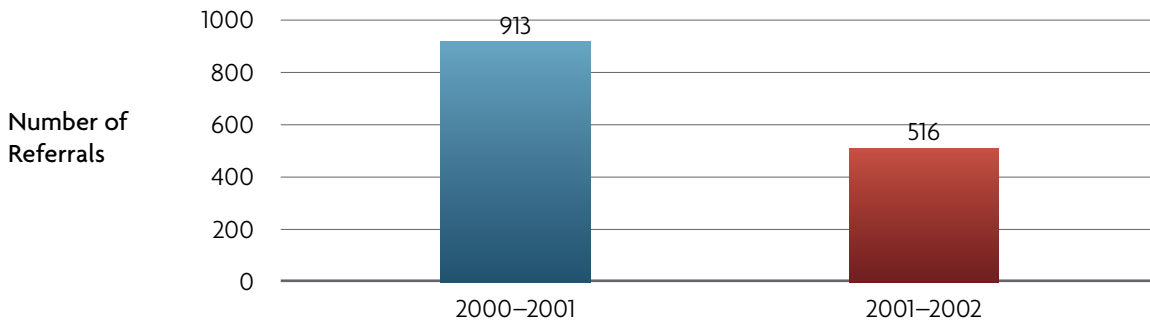
Rural Fringe Middle School
GRADES 6–8
37 Teachers
529 Students

- › Grade 6: 179
- › Grade 7: 176
- › Grade 8: 174

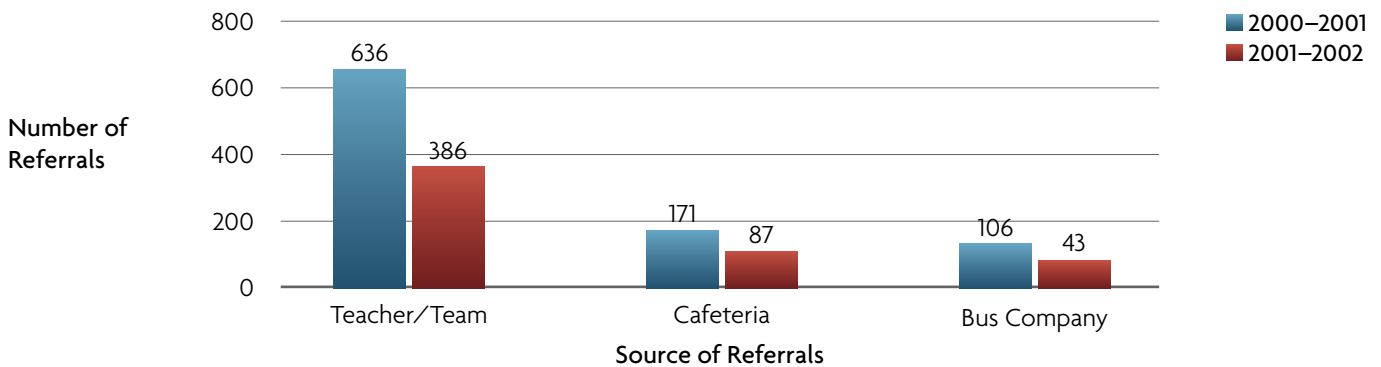
Source: *NCES Kids' Zone*, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

Palisades Middle School Data

Disciplinary Referrals to Student Office in 2 School Years



Disciplinary Referrals to Student Office in 2 School Years by Referral Source



Source: *Laura Mirsky, "SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Practices," Restorative Practices eForum, May 20, 2003, www.iirp.edu/library/ssspilots.html*

Springfield Township High School

1801 E. Paper Mill Rd., Erdenheim, Pennsylvania 19038

Springfield Township is in the first ring of suburbs around Philadelphia. The school district receives many urban transfer students and has a mobile student body. The administration believes the students are more “street smart” than traditional suburban students.

Joseph Roy became principal of Springfield Township High School in January 2000. The entire Springfield faculty was introduced to restorative practices in fall 2001. Data gathered by the school since restorative practices was introduced indicate decreases in discipline problems, disrespect and defiance.

The challenge at Springfield, said Roy, has been to integrate students from different systems into the culture of the school, rather than let the culture of the school shift toward the disruptive and unruly. Roy said that restorative practices had definitely helped that concern. “Usually kids will catch onto ‘OK, this is how we behave at this school, this is what the expectations are and this is the culture’ and they get on board,” he said.

Prior to restorative practices, students were kicked out of class and sent to a “time-out room.” “Sometimes they’d get there, sometimes they wouldn’t,” said Roy. “If they got there they just hung out. There was no follow-up.”

Now during in-school suspensions, assistant principal Michael Kell gives each student a list of questions to think about: What happened? Who do you think has been affected by your actions? What can you do to repair the harm? He discusses the questions with the student and often brings in the teacher involved to talk about how everyone feels and help mend relationships. Kell also facilitates formal restorative conferences when serious problems arise, as does guidance counselor Kevin McGeehan.

Staff employ a restorative approach in everyday interactions with students. “When I see a kid acting up in the hallway, instead of dragging him into the discipline office, I’ll pull him over, one-on-one, and try to understand where he’s coming from,” said McGeehan.

Teachers use check-in and check-out circles with both classroom management and academic issues to “create the culture that says, ‘We talk about stuff as a group and we help each other out,’” said Roy. He considers restorative practices to be part of culture building, including treating kids with respect and having a team of teachers and parents identify the school’s core values. “It’s all part of restorative practices.” Said Roy, “When you get to the point where it’s informal but constant, that’s where you want to be.”

Source: Laura Mirsky, “SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Practices,” *Restorative Practices eForum*, May 20, 2003, www.iirp.edu/library/ssspilots.html

Springfield Township High School Characteristics

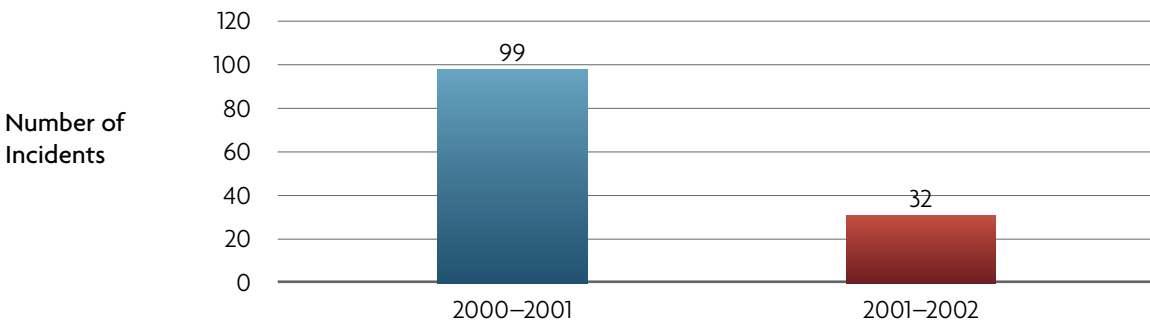
Large Suburban High School
GRADES 8–12
68 Teachers
834 Students

- › Grade 8: 154
- › Grade 9: 159
- › Grade 10: 157
- › Grade 11: 200
- › Grade 12: 164

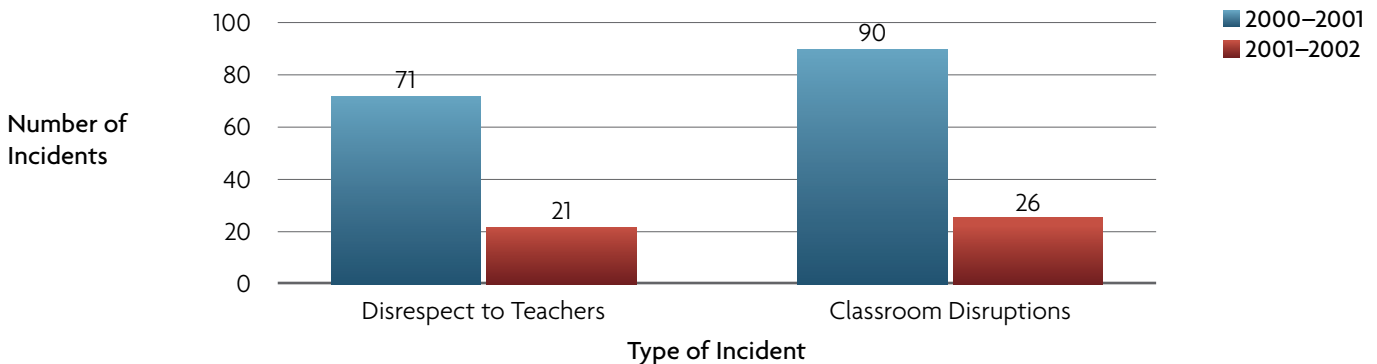
Source: *NCES Kids' Zone*, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

Springfield Township High School Data

Incidents of Inappropriate Behavior in 2 School Years



Classroom Incidents by Type in 2 School Years



Source: *Laura Mirsky, "SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Practices," Restorative Practices eForum, May 20, 2003, www.iirp.edu/library/ssspilots.html*

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

CANADIAN & BRITISH SCHOOLS



www.iirp.edu

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board

1994 Fisher Dr., Peterborough, Ontario, Canada K9J 7A1

In the summer of 2004, the Kawartha Pine Ridge (KPR) District School Board began restorative practices implementation. Starting with a successful restorative practices pilot program in four elementary and secondary schools, the senior board administration proceeded with a major effort to develop the restorative practices framework across 95 elementary and secondary schools as a systemic approach. Kawartha Pine Ridge was the first major school board in North America to follow this path.

From fall 2006 to June 2008, each KPR school underwent a full day in-service to familiarize all staff with restorative practices; each held in-school assemblies with all students, as well as parent workshops.

There are numerous examples of how restorative practices has positively changed the interactions between students and teachers: children meeting in impromptu restorative circles, thousands of informal restorative interventions, over 60 formal restorative conferences over the 2007–2008 school year to address harm, school staff meeting in facilitated restorative circles to deal with conflict, the restorative questions posted throughout schools as a way to guide and influence language and thinking. All indications are that a paradigm shift is occurring, as school administrators, teachers, students and parents across the board move from addressing harm in a punitive way to thinking of restorative solutions.

Restorative practices is also supporting a paradigm shift for dealing with suspended and expelled students. Instead of dealing with problem student behavior by getting rid of the student, the goal is to reintegrate the suspended or expelled student as well as to effectively deal with others who are negatively affected by the incident, including the larger school community.

“What we are doing here in the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board is cutting-edge and setting a trend in the manner that inappropriate behavior is handled. This is achieved in a manner that facilitates repair of harm (victims, schools, others), builds empathy, promotes student accountability, responsibility and reintegration, and sees misbehavior as an opportunity for learning, not punishment.

“Probably one of the greatest impacts of this initiative is when teachers and students utilize this approach in the classroom. Not only do many fewer issues come to the office, but the classroom environment is healthier and students are more productive.”

— Bruce Schenk, director of IIRP Canada

Source: Bruce Schenk, director of IIRP Canada, “Restorative Practice and Our Schools: A Visionary Journey,” a report to the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, August 2008

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board Characteristics

Urban & Rural Communities

82 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

16 SECONDARY SCHOOLS

4 Adult Learning Centers

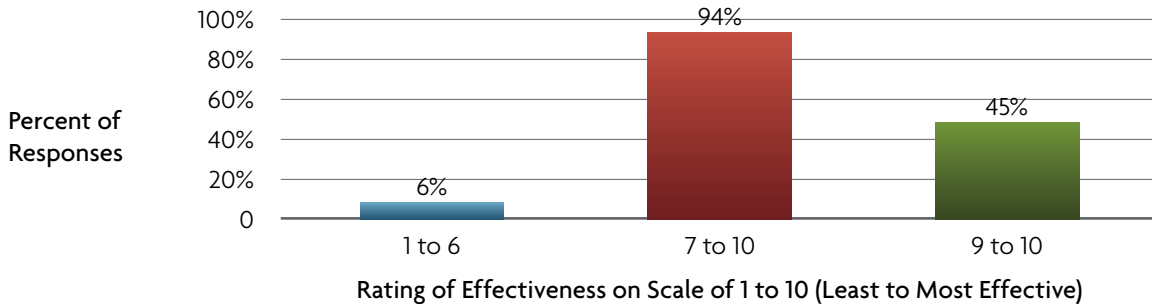
35,491 students

- › 22,166 Elementary
- › 13,325 Secondary

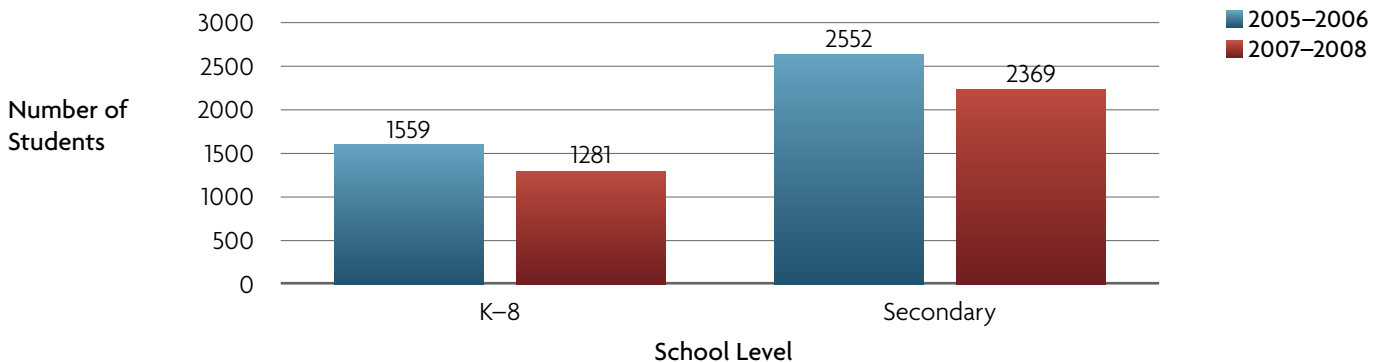
Source: Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, www.kpr.edu.on.ca/aboutus/general_info.php, February 2009

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board Data

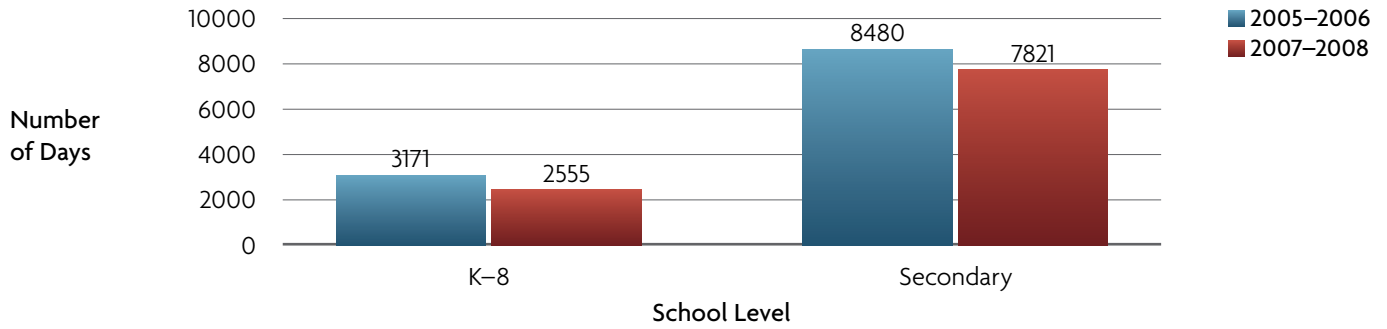
School Administrators' Perception of Overall Effectiveness of Restorative Circles in Addressing Harm and Repairing the Situation (One Year Data 2006–2007)



Student Suspensions by School Level in 2 School Years



Total Suspension Days by School Level in 2 School Years



Source: Bruce Schenk, director of IIRP Canada, "Restorative Practice and Our Schools: A Visionary Journey," a report to the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, August 2008

Keewatin-Patricia District School Board

100 First Ave. W., Kenora, Ontario, Canada PN9 3Z7

From 2004 to 2009, the Keewatin-Patricia District Public School Board has transformed the “no tolerance” disciplinary approach to a restorative practices approach. As a result, suspensions have declined significantly every year.

Using a non-punitive series of strategies, where administrators and teachers engage and support students, suspensions have fallen from 1,850 involving 892 students in 2003–2004 to 501 involving 330 students last year. Based on the accumulated data to date this year, they estimate the number of suspensions will fall below 500 this year for the first time this decade.

The restorative practices direction was taken after a local trustee-led initiative in 2004, which questioned the effectiveness of suspensions to correct student behavior.

“We were ahead of our time,” reflected Al Wray, the Safe and Supportive Schools coordinator. “Our findings were that with repeat offenders — unless you dealt with the root causes — you weren’t going to change things.”

“We’re finding that by supporting students who are participating in inappropriate behavior, we’re reducing the number of suspensions,” Wray said. “We’re finding a lot of that support involves the families. They’re thanking us for that support because it’s making the students successful at home as well as at school.”

To implement the program in classrooms, the board has allotted \$150,000 to training and materials to create a culture of restorative practices, entrenching the language and philosophy of the practice into the curriculum. Evergreen Public School will be one of two pilot schools to lead the board in its implementation.

Wray described a situation where youth had tagged the Kenora Skate Park with graffiti. The school held a meeting with them and other young people who had built the park to explain how their actions had damaged a source of community pride. Wray said the offending youth had never considered how their actions affected others. Instead of a suspension, the students wrote apologies, paid financial restitution and performed community service hours. Asked Wray, “What would suspension have done?”

Source: Jon Thompson, “Student Suspensions Decline After New Disciplinary Program Introduced,” *Lake of the Woods Enterprise*, Ontario, Canada, www.lotwenterprise.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1433362, February 2009

Keewatin-Patricia District School Board Characteristics

5,446 Student Enrollment

16 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

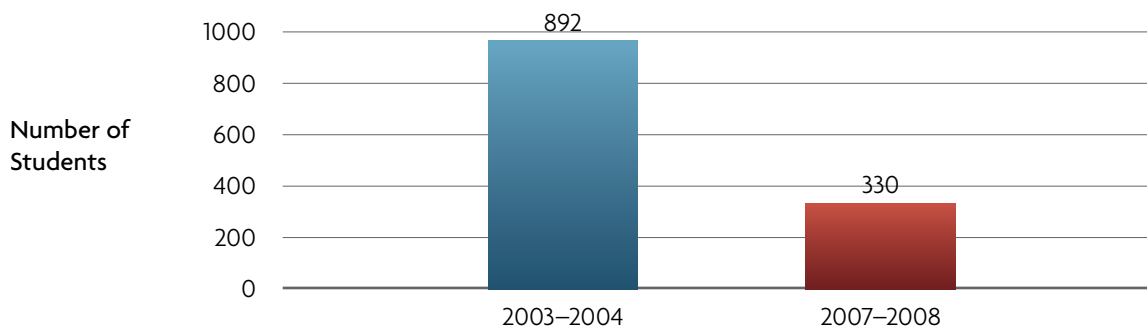
5 HIGH SCHOOLS

- › 32.2% First Nation
- › 7.9% Metis
- › 0.1% Inuit
- › 59.8% Other

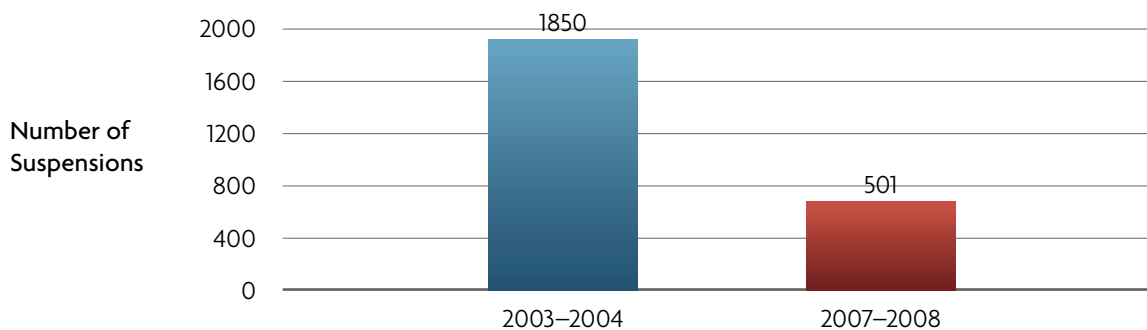
Source: *Keewatin Patricia District School Board: Annual Director's Report*, www.kpdsb.on.ca/boardInformation/boardReport.asp, February 2009

Keewatin-Patricia District School Board Data

Number of Students Suspended in 2 School Years



Number of Suspensions in 2 School Years



Source: *Lake of the Woods Enterprise, Ontario, Canada*, www.lotwenterprise.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1433362, February 2009

Bessels Leigh School

Abingdon, Oxfordshire, England, UK OX13 5QB

Bessels Leigh School is a residential school for boys with emotional and behavioral difficulties, ages 11 to 16. Established in 1964, Bessels Leigh School formerly served mostly pupils at the milder end of the behavioral spectrum. The school's previous philosophy — traditional, structured and authoritarian — generally served both staff and students well. But the school's client group began to change around 1994, due to the national political agenda, local government finances and a move to place the majority of youth in mainstream education.

The school's former disciplinary system failed to meet the new challenges and actually contributed to the increasing problems. Some of the newer, more difficult clientele challenged the use of detentions to punish behavioral infractions. Staff was determined to carry out the punishments, and physical confrontations ensued. The sense of community eroded. Staff-pupil relationships changed to an "us and them" situation, and vandalism and antisocial behavior increased dramatically. Staff suffered rising levels of stress, and staff absenteeism and turnover increased.

In 2005 the staff of the school and the residential unit received the IIRP's Introduction to Restorative Practices training. Subsequently both staffs received training in restorative circles. The boys, with the staff's help, established "norms" — rules for running circles and for acceptable and safe behavior. Circles are now embedded in the school culture. The boys have made the circle process their own.

The school began holding classroom circles each morning in addition to the residential-based evening circles. The staff also holds circles for themselves at least every two weeks. The domestic and secretarial staffs were also trained in restorative practices, as some were being very abrasive with the boys. These staff members now join the other staff in their regular circle meetings.

Besides reintroducing a sense of community, restorative practices has greatly reduced property damage. There used to be a serious problem with boys breaking windows; one week over £1,000 was spent on windows. It had become the norm — get angry, break a window. Restorative practices virtually put an end to this.

"Restorative practices has had a very real, positive impact on our school. The change is clear to the staff and to the boys. Restorative practices has empowered staff to take control of situations, raise issues, question behavior and examine their relationships with the boys and with each other."

—John Boulton, principal, Bessels Leigh School

Source: John Boulton & Laura Mirsky, "Restorative Practices as a Tool for Organizational Change: The Bessels Leigh School," *Restorative Practices eForum*, February 23, 2006, www.realjustice.org/library/besselsleigh.html

Bessels Leigh School Characteristics

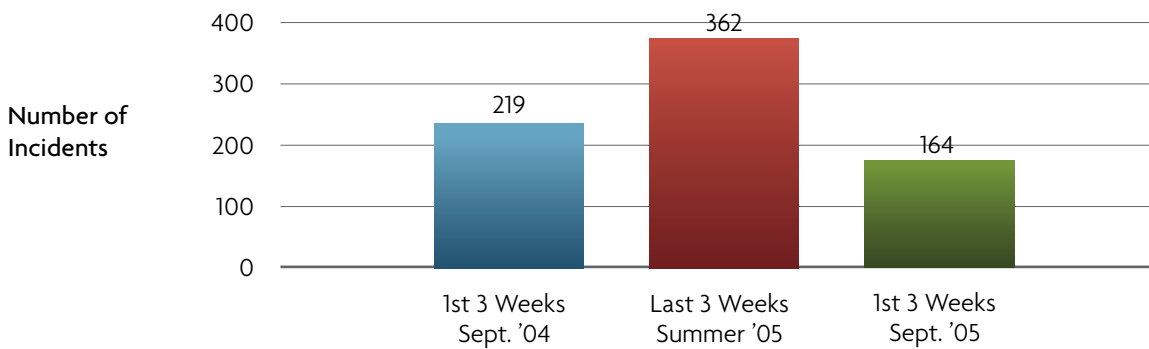
Age Range: 11–16
Full Boarding Pupils: 37 boys
Grades 8–12

- › 35 Full-Time and 5 Part-Time Staff
- › 37 Special Needs Students
 - Dyslexia/Specific Learning Difficulties
 - Social, Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties
 - Moderate Learning Difficulties
 - Asperger’s Syndrome

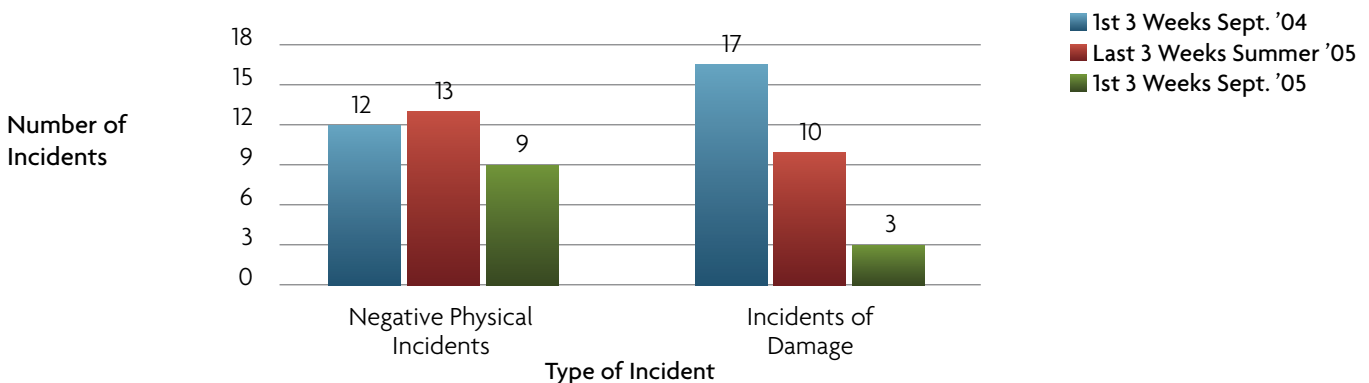
Source: Bessels Leigh School, www.isbi.com/isbi-viewschool/3137-Bessels_Leigh_School.html, February 2009

Bessels Leigh School Data

Negative Student Incidents in 3 Time Periods



Reported Student Incidents by Type in 3 Time Periods



Source: John Boulton & Laura Mirsky, “Restorative Practices as a Tool for Organizational Change: The Bessels Leigh School,” *Restorative Practices eForum*, February 23, 2006, www.realjustice.org/library/besselsleigh.html

City of Hull

Hull, England, UK

Hull, UK, led by the Hull Centre for Restorative Practices (HCRP) and the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), is endeavoring to become a “restorative city.” The goal is for everyone who works with children and youth in Hull, one of England’s most economically and socially deprived cities, to employ restorative practices. Nigel Richardson, Hull’s director of Children and Young People’s Services, is leading the initiative. Participants are committed to implementing an explicit means of managing relationships and building social connection and responsibility while providing a means to repair harm when relationships break down.

SCHOOLS

First Hull pilot school: Before restorative practices, Collingwood Primary School was given Ofsted’s (Britain’s Office for Standards in Education) lowest ranking: “Needing Special Measures.” Within two years of implementing restorative practices, it achieved Ofsted’s highest ranking: “Outstanding.” From spring 2007 to July 2008, Collingwood’s exclusions (expulsions) decreased 98 percent and punctuality improved 87 percent. Second Hull pilot school: Restorative practices brought about enormous changes at Endeavour High School. The recent Ofsted report described Endeavour as a school where “respect and safety are the norm and problems get sorted out.” Restorative practices has produced positive results at nine schools (the two above plus seven “Phase 2” schools) in Riverside, Hull’s most economically deprived neighborhood.

THE FAMILIES PROJECT

Head teachers (principals) work to identify and support children experiencing the greatest difficulties in behavior, attendance and achievement. Circles are held with these children, their family members and key staff for everyone to discuss how they feel about the problems and what to do. Involving family members has proved beneficial to everyone.

POLICE

In December 2008, Hull police agreed to use restorative processes for first-time minor offenses before any judicial process is invoked. Inspector Iain Dixon said that all 170 Hull police officers have received a one-day introduction to restorative practices training and 65 have been trained to facilitate restorative conferences (which bring together victims, offenders and their supporters to repair the harm of wrongdoing or crime). Restorative practices is mostly being used in neighborhood conflicts thus far.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICES

Restorative practices is proving highly successful in Hull’s Children and Young People’s Services Safeguarding and Development (CYPSSD) area, which includes fostering, adoption, residential and field work. Silvia Madrid, looked-after children partnership and development officer, said that all Hull CYPSSD practitioners, including those who work with disabled children, are being trained in restorative practices. The practices have greatly reduced children’s criminal records and police involvement in Hull children’s homes. Circles are also used for children’s home staff issues.

City of Hull Characteristics

2001 Census: Hull’s Population — 253,400

2001 Census: 9th Most Deprived of 354 English Districts

2003 National Survey: 27% of city’s households have incomes under 10,000 pounds.

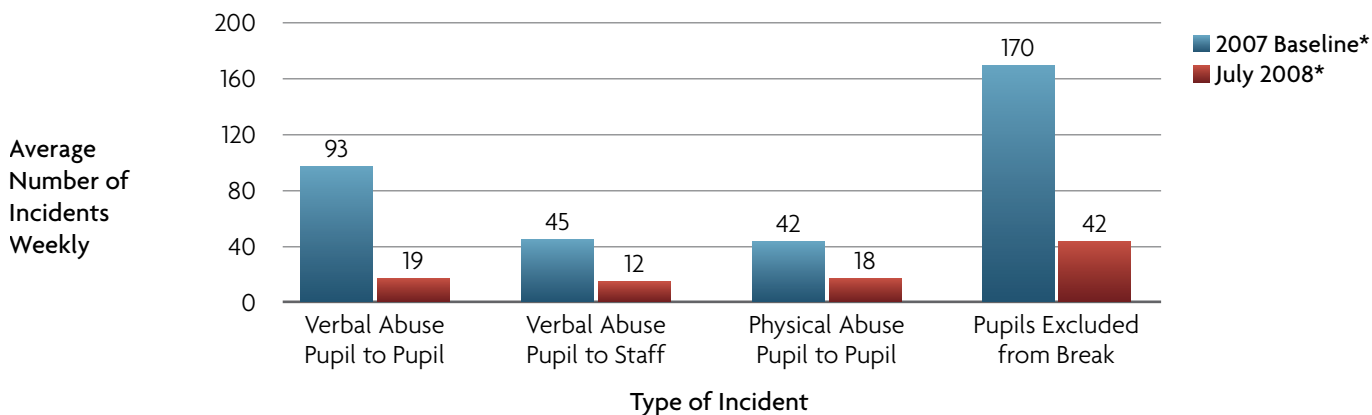
2005 Unemployment claimant rate 5.4%

› over twice as high as the national average (2.2%)

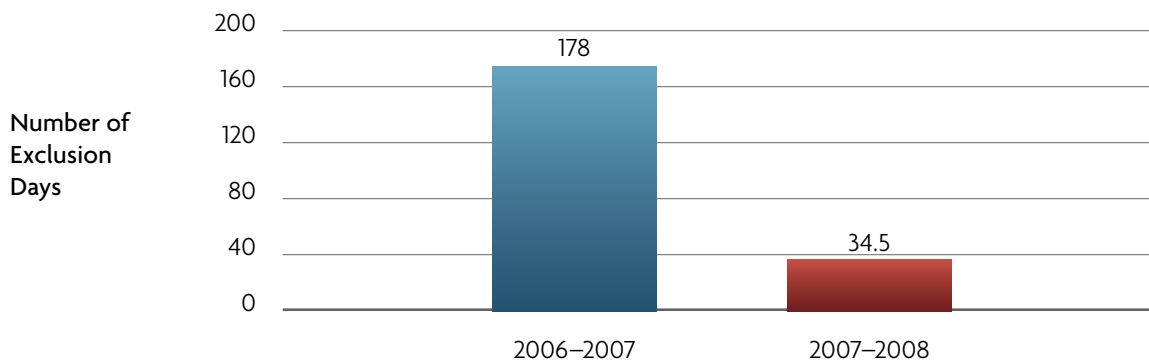
Source: Hull City Council: Home www.Hullcc.gov.uk, February 2009

City of Hull Data — 7 “Phase 2” Schools

Behavioral Incidents by Type in 2 Time Periods



Fixed Term Exclusion (Suspension) Days in 2 School Years

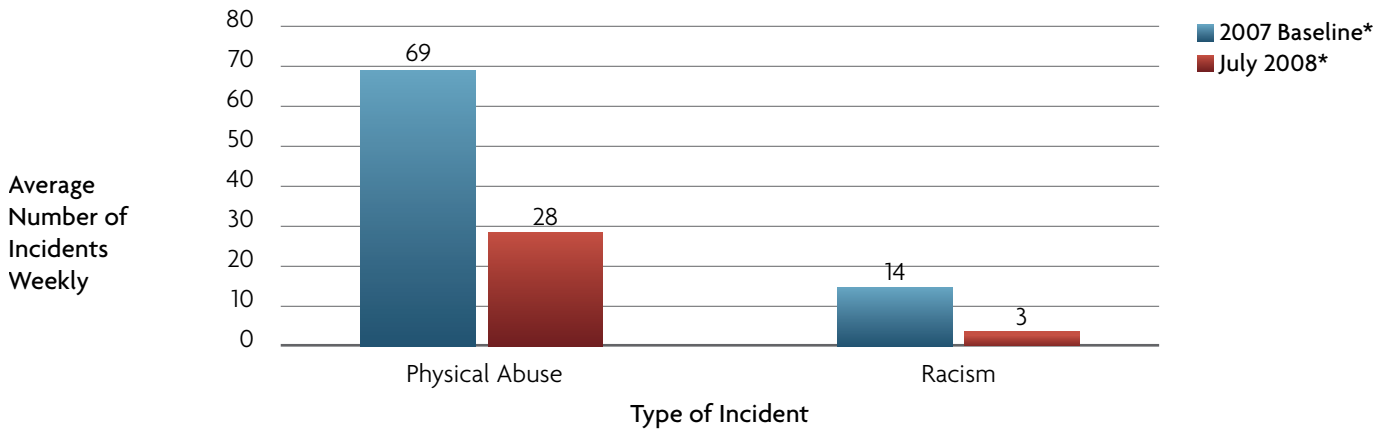


* 2007 Baseline data includes the last 4 weeks of Summer Term plus the first 2 weeks of Autumn Term 2007.
 July 2008 data includes 6 weeks of Summer Term 2008.

Source: Hull Centre for Restorative Practices & International Institute for Restorative Practices—UK Office, The City of Hull: Riverside Project, September 2008

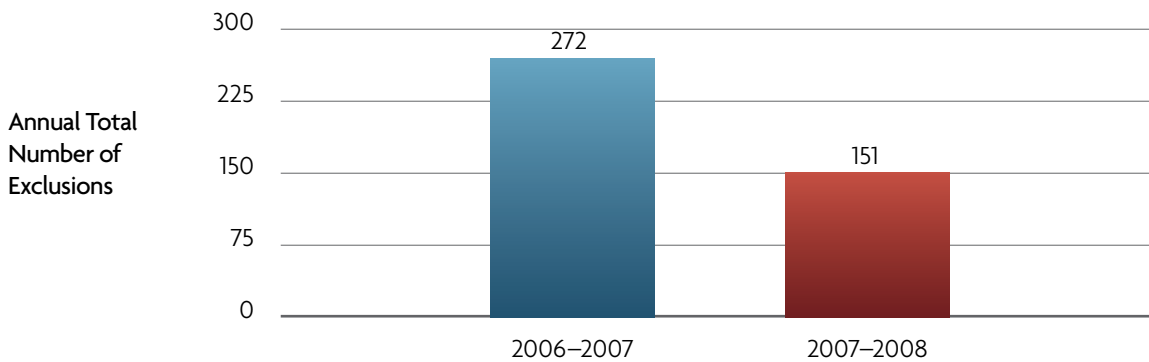
City of Hull Data — Endeavour High School

Behavioral Incidents by Type in 2 Time Periods

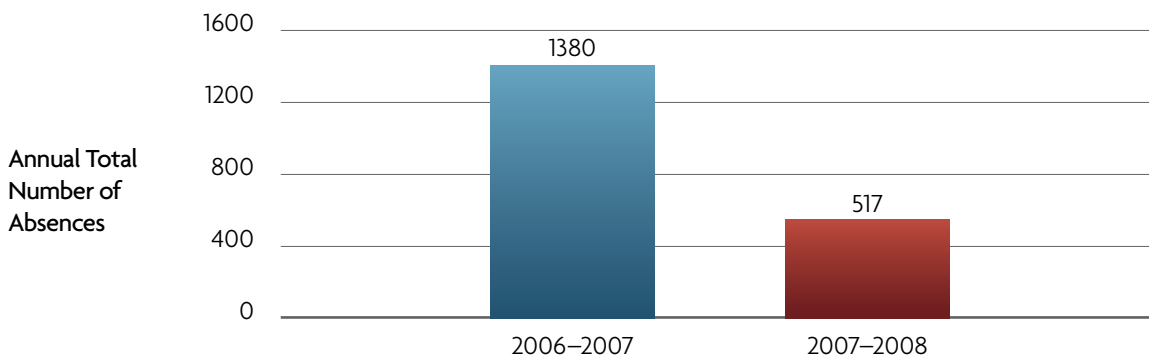


* 2007 Baseline data includes 6 weeks in Spring Term 2007. July 2008 data includes 6 weeks of Summer Term 2008.

Fixed-Term Exclusions (Suspensions) in 2 School Years



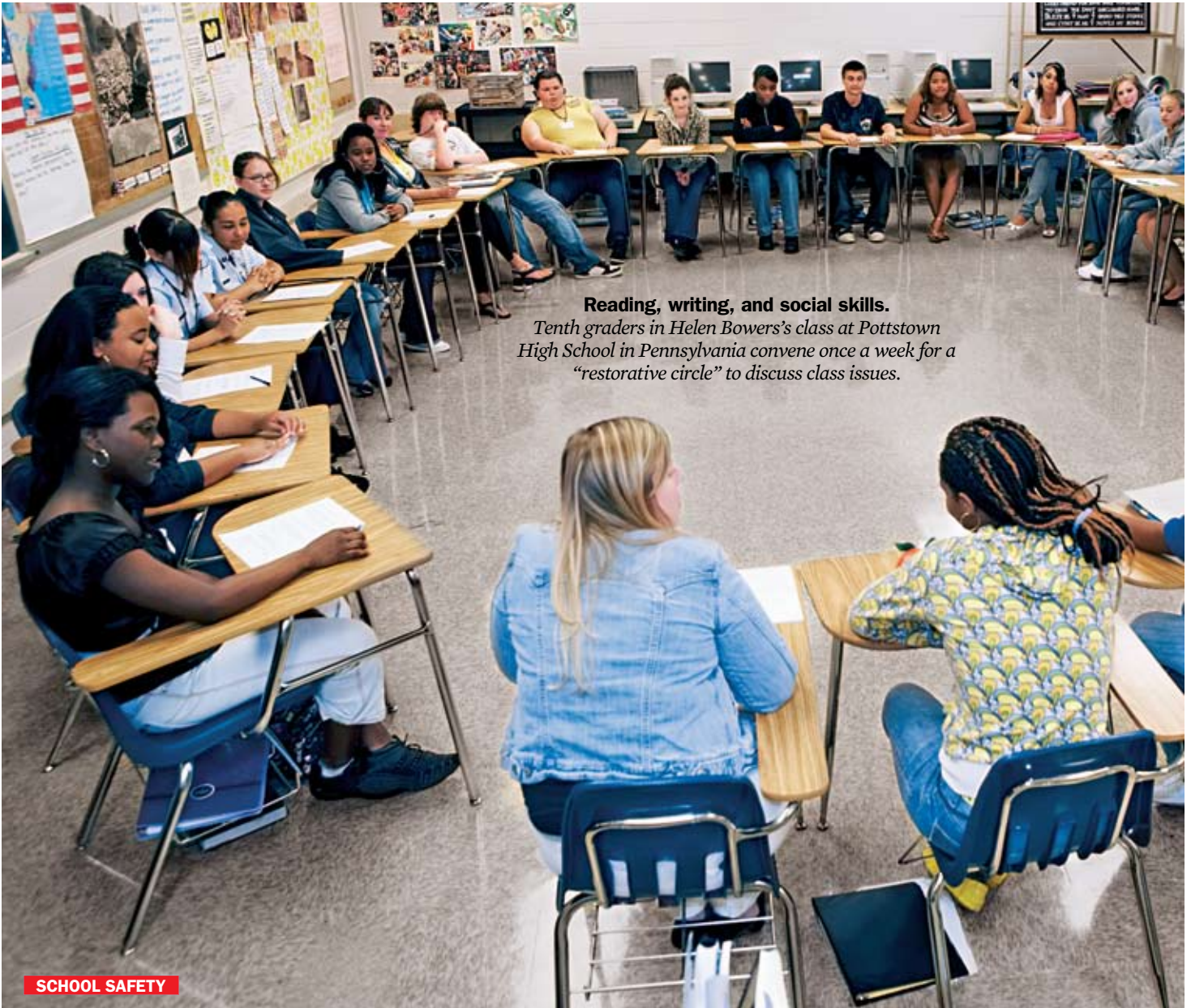
Staff Absences in 2 School Years



Source: Hull Centre for Restorative Practices & International Institute for Restorative Practices—UK Office, The City of Hull: Riverside Project, September 2008

REFERENCES

- Adams, C. (2008 November/December). The talk-it-out solution. *Scholastic Administrator*, 36–39.
- Boulton, J., & Mirsky, L. (2006, February). Restorative practices as a tool for organizational change: The Bessels Leigh School. *Restorative Practices eForum*. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.realjustice.org/library/besselsleigh.html>
- Hull Centre for Restorative Practices & International Institute for Restorative Practices–UK Office. (2008, September). The City of Hull: Riverside Project. Hull, UK: Paul Carlile.
- Hull City Council: Home. (2009, February). Retrieved February 21, 2009, from <http://www.hullcc.gov.uk>
- International Institute for Restorative Practices. (2009, April). Safer Saner Urban Schools: The Story of West Philadelphia High (streaming video). Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.iirp.edu/westphilahigh>
- ISBI (Independent Special Boarding International) Schools. (2009, April). Bessels Leigh School. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from http://www.isbi.com/isbi-viewschool/3137-Bessels_Leigh_School.html
- Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. (2009, February). Retrieved February 18, 2009, from http://www.kpr.edu.on.ca/aboutus/general_info.php
- Keewatin Patricia District School Board: Annual Director's Report. (2009, February). <http://www.kpdsb.on.ca/boardInformation/boardReport.asp>
- Lake of the Woods Enterprise*, Ontario, Canada. (2009, February). Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.lotwenterprise.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1433362>
- McCold, P. (2002, November). Evaluation of a restorative milieu: CSF Buxmont school/day treatment programs 1999–2001, presented at American Society of Criminology annual meeting, November 13–16, 2002, Chicago, IL. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.realjustice.org/library/erm.html>
- McCold, P. (2004, November). Evaluation of a restorative milieu: Replication and extension for 2001–2003 discharges, presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meeting, November 16–19, 2004, Nashville, TN. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.realjustice.org/library/erm2.html>
- McCold, P. & Chang, A. (2008, May). Analysis of students discharged during three school years: 2003–2006. *Restorative Practices eForum*. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from http://www.realjustice.org/library/CSF_2007.html
- Mirsky, L. (2003, May). SaferSanerSchools: Transforming school culture with restorative practices. *Restorative Practices eForum*. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.iirp.edu/library/ssspilots.html>
- Mirsky, L. (2009, January). Hull, UK: Toward a restorative city. *Restorative Practices eForum*. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.safersanerschools.org/library/hull09>
- NCES Kids' Zone. (2009, February). Retrieved February 21, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp>
- Schenk, B. (2008, August). Restorative practice and our schools: A visionary journey. A report to the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board.
- Thompson, J. (2009, February). Student suspensions decline after new disciplinary program introduced. *Lake of the Woods Enterprise*. Ontario, Canada. <http://www.lotwenterprise.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1433362>



Reading, writing, and social skills.
Tenth graders in Helen Bowers's class at Pottstown High School in Pennsylvania convene once a week for a "restorative circle" to discuss class issues.

SCHOOL SAFETY

PHOTOS: © RONNIE ANDREN

The Talk-It-Out Solution

How can you promote safety?

Try getting rid of the metal detectors.

BY CARALEE ADAMS

WHAT MAKES FOR A SAFE school? Security guards patrolling the hallways? Metal detectors? Zero-tolerance policies? The answer may be none of the above: Educators are searching for new solutions to achieving harmony in the classroom and, surprisingly, they're increasingly holistic. "There aren't enough bars, metal detectors, or police to make a school safe if there is a culture of violence in a school," says Ted Wachtel, founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. "You need to strike at the heart of the culture."

Trying restorative practices

One safer schools initiative making its way across the nation is the implementation of "restorative practices." Rather than meting out punishments, restorative practices employs a talk-it-out approach to foster dialogue between aggrieved students. Students are taught basic social skills to problem-solve and lower the tension in schools. One premise of the strategy is that kids feel safe when there is cooperation instead of hostility; another is that kids who feel valued and connected at school are less likely to act out. Many administrators around the country are investing in restorative practices programs to build a healthy school climate in hopes of fending off violence and improving academic performance.

Restorative practices places responsibility on the students themselves rather than relying on zero tolerance and authoritarian control from above. It uses a collaborative response to wrongdoing, which is intended to be supportive, not demeaning. While some may feel it's too "touchy-feely," Wachtel maintains that it's effective and its impact is proven.

In 1977, Wachtel and his wife, Susan, both public school teachers, founded the Community Service Foundation, a sister organization to the International Institute for Restorative Practices. Their work evolved into strategies they named restorative practices, a spin-off of the restorative justice movement. But it wasn't until 1999 that the IIRP developed its SaferSanerSchools program that tailored the restorative practices concept to a school setting.

Newtown Middle School in Newtown, Pennsylvania, is one school that adopted the restorative practices model, and it has seen drastic changes in behavior. Over a three-year period, the detention rate dropped 82 percent and suspensions are

down 59 percent. Administrators credit the approach with making the school safer by building a sense of community.

"When restorative practices were instituted, we started to have a cultural shift in the way we treated kids and adults. People began to treat each other with a lot of civility," says Richard Hollahan, principal of the affluent suburban school of seventh and eighth graders.

How it works

When a discipline problem arises, all the parties assemble in a circle. They present their sides and work to resolve the issue and restore their relationships. The emphasis is on repairing the harm, rather than punishing the offender—although accountability is part of the process too.

At the core of restorative practices is the belief that people will make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them. People accept decisions more readily if they have input, Wachtel explains.

While punishment may spur a temporary change, a more lasting solution is to help kids see how their actions impact others and how they can learn to control negative impulses, maintains Wachtel. "Kids don't think of teachers as human beings. When they hear a person was frightened or hurt, they gain some empathy and they are more dramatically affected than by punishment," he continues. "We have the mistaken notion that the only way to change behavior is to inflict pain and suffering, but that doesn't work."

Get the support staff involved

When a school decides to try the restorative practices approach, IIRP suggests training all professional and support staff in a one-day introductory workshop, customizing it to the needs of the school. The goal is to build a culture where kids are less likely to do negative things because they have a relationship with teachers and staff, says Bob Costello, director of training and consulting for IIRP.

Training is recommended for everyone because support staffers often interact with students with very little supervision and not a lot of organizational power, says Costello. It's important that they buy into the concept for it to become organic in the school, he adds.

The program encourages collective responsibility in which students help create and enforce the rules. The hope is that eventually they will say to one another, "We don't act like that," says Costello.



Kids in the hall. A few classrooms used restorative practices; it is now schoolwide.



Talking it out. Bowers's restorative circle can last from ten minutes to a half hour.

Dramatic results

Restorative practices are being implemented mainly in public secondary schools, prompted by a mandate to improve school safety, says John Baille, training and consulting coordinator for IIRP.

Just a few months into using the program, West Philadelphia High School is seeing results. "We had a lot of issues of violence, fires, kids misbehaving in class, disrespect," says Russell Gallagher, assistant principal at the low-income, racially diverse urban school. "We want the kids to take ownership. We think restorative practices will do that."

Since West Philadelphia High adopted restorative practices last spring, suspensions are down 50 percent and recidivism has plummeted, says Gallagher. "You have to give students a voice," he says. Often the victim in an incident is timid. But when they are given the chance to say, "That hurt me," it empowers the student and includes accountability for the aggressor. "What restorative practices does is change the emotional atmosphere of the school," says Gallagher. "You can stop guns, but you can't stop them from bringing fists or a poor attitude. A metal detector won't detect that."

Community Service Foundation & Buxmont Academy

Eastern Pennsylvania, USA

The restorative practices approach, as covered in this booklet, was developed at Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy (CSF Buxmont) and adapted for use in public and other schools. CSF Buxmont operates eight alternative school/day treatment programs, 15 foster group homes and various in-home services for delinquent and at-risk youth in eastern Pennsylvania, which are also demonstration programs of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) Graduate School. CSF Buxmont has been operating since 1977. All CSF Buxmont programs employ restorative practices, an approach that holds people accountable while actively engaging them in problem solving. Three research studies performed over seven years with 4,000 delinquent and at-risk youth discharged from CSF Buxmont's restorative milieus show offending rates being reduced by more than half.

1st Research Evaluation, 1999–2001 — Offending Reduced 58%

- › Total population measured: 919 youth, grades 7–12
- › Evaluation protocols by Temple University's Crime and Justice Research Center
- › Additional findings found program effect of enhancing pro-social attitudes and raising individuals' self-esteem

Source: Paul McCold, "Evaluation of a Restorative Milieu: CSF Buxmont School/Day Treatment Programs 1999–2001," presented at American Society of Criminology annual meeting, November 13-16, 2002, Chicago, Illinois, www.realjustice.org/library/erm.html

2nd Research Evaluation, 2001–2003 — Offending Reduced 50%

- › Total population measured: 858 youth, grades 7–12
- › A scientific replication of the original study's findings with a new population
- › A follow-up of the 1999–2001 population two years after discharge demonstrates lasting program effect

Source: Paul McCold, "Evaluation of a Restorative Milieu: Replication and Extension for 2001–2003 Discharges," presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meeting, November 16-19, 2004, Nashville, Tennessee, www.realjustice.org/library/erm2.html

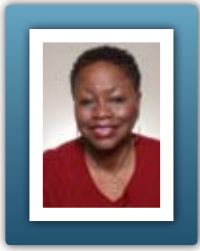
3rd Research Evaluation, 2003–2006 — Offending Reduced 62%

- › Total population measured: 2,151 youth, grades 7–12
- › 3-, 6- and 12-month post-discharge offending rates reduced
- › Further confirmation of positive program effect

Source: Paul McCold & Ansik Chang, "Analysis of Students Discharged During Three School Years: 2003–2006," *Restorative Practices eForum*, May 1, 2008, www.realjustice.org/library/CSF_2007.html

About The Author

Sharon Lewis, M.S., Director of Research, IIRP Graduate School



As a former high school teacher, assistant superintendent for research and school reform in Detroit Public Schools and research director for the Council of the Great City Schools, Sharon Lewis has always had a particular interest in improving the quality of education in urban schools. Therefore she looks at restorative practices with an urban perspective, hoping to assist IIRP in the implementation and evaluation of its programs in big-city schools.

What People Are Saying About Restorative Practices

“We didn’t really believe that we could get our kids to the point where they could express remorse, sympathy and respect. Now the kids have embraced restorative practices even more than the adults.”

—Saliyah Cruz, principal, West Philadelphia High School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

“Thanks to restorative practices, there’s no more feeling of ‘us versus them.’ Staff and kids are all one team.”

—Stephen Rodriguez, principal, Pottstown High School, Pottstown, Pennsylvania, USA

“When I first took over this school it was in ‘Special Measures’ and at risk of being shut down. Restorative practices helped it achieve ‘Outstanding’ status — the best it can possibly be.”

—Estelle MacDonald, head teacher, Collingwood Primary School, Hull, England, UK

“Restorative practices has fostered a greater development of community, inclusion and empathy in our schools. Suspension rates have dropped significantly while student engagement has increased.”

—W.R. (Rusty) Hick, superintendent of education, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Ontario, Canada

“I used to get in a lot of trouble, but teachers talk to students and help you make the right decisions here. In homeroom we sit in a circle and talk about anything that needs to be brought up.”

—Eighth-grade girl, Palisades Middle School, Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, USA

For information on bringing restorative practices to your school or district, visit safersanerschools.org or call 610-807-9221.

SaferSanerSchools™ is a project of the IIRP Continuing Education Division.