



Restorative Justice?

A Brief Overview

What is Restorative Justice?



Restorative justice is an evidence-based practice used to reduce expulsions, suspensions, and disciplinary referrals. It focuses on righting a wrong committed, repairing harm done, and placing value on restoring relationships (Restorative Practices Working Group, 2014). Schools can apply restorative justice in different ways, such as talking or community circles, youth courts, peer mediation programs, or classroom meetings (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014).



Restorative justice practices stem from indigenous peoples who felt collectively responsible for building and repairing their own communities (Boyes - Watson, 2008).

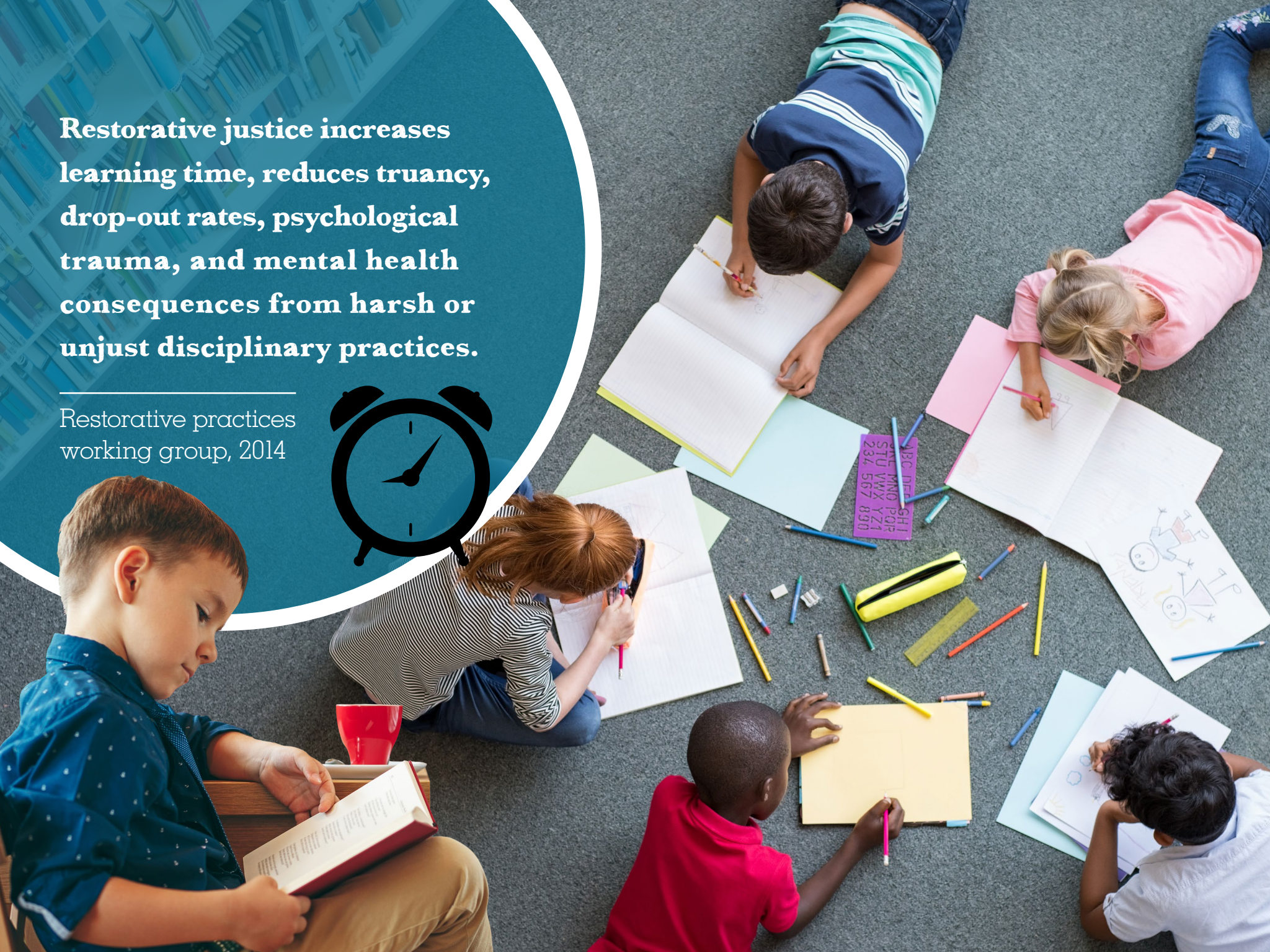
Why we need Restorative Justice



School districts and campuses are increasingly looking to move away from zero-tolerance disciplinary policies and towards alternative approaches that improve school culture and climate and build supportive and safe environments for students.

Restorative justice increases learning time, reduces truancy, drop-out rates, psychological trauma, and mental health consequences from harsh or unjust disciplinary practices.

Restorative practices working group, 2014





Restorative justice programs can serve as alternative options to suspension or expulsion which potentially sets students back in schoolwork.

Walsh, 2015



Research



Restorative justice practices have experienced high growth in the United States.

The following studies highlight the effectiveness of restorative justice programs.

Research Findings

A two-year study of 12 weekly talking circles at an urban high school with high suspension rates.

- Talking circles promoted relational themes of togetherness, feeling safe, expressing genuine emotions, and cultivated empathy.
- Girls experienced an improvement in anger management and listening and empathetic skills, which lead to greater self-efficacy.
- Talking circles can potentially develop social-emotional skills and growth-fostering relationships in school.

Research Findings



Concerned with bullying and suspension rates, Ed White Middle School in San Antonio, TX implemented a Restorative Discipline Program.

- The Restorative Discipline Program reduced suspension and expulsion rates.
- The program decreased misconduct acts, violent acts, and teacher turnover.
- Ed White Middle School experienced an increase in academic achievement and school engagement.

Research Findings



Evaluation of the Whole School Restorative Justice (WSRJ) program implemented in Oakland Unified School District.

Research Findings

- Significant reduction in up to 50% of suspensions among specific restorative justice compared to non-restorative justice schools.
- The African American suspension rate for disruption or willful defiance significantly decreased by 30%.
- 90% of teachers reported restorative justice practices are helpful or very helpful in managing difficult student behavior in the classroom, and 53% said it helped reduce disciplinary referrals for African American students.
- Chronic absenteeism decreased by 24%
- 76% of conflicts were resolved using restorative justice circles and conversations.
- Reading levels increased by 128% compared to 11% in non-restorative justice schools.
- Four-year graduation rates increased by 60%.
- High school drop-out rates decreased by 56%.
- A qualitative analysis revealed that participants had increased empathy, understanding for peers, and sense of accountability and agency.

Jain et al., 2014

The Potential of Restorative Justice

- Build, restore, and/or repair relationships.
- Reduce suspension rates.
- Increase graduation rates and decrease drop-out rates.
- Increase academic achievement.
- Develop social-emotional skills and empathy.



References

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