



Restorative Practices

Implementation in Suburban
Cook County Schools



Cook County DEPT of
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Restorative practices offer an evidence-based alternative to exclusionary discipline in schools.

Studies show that restorative practices can decrease suspensions and expulsions, as well as improve mental health, social-emotional skills, and sense of belonging.

Restorative practices can also help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and bridge racial disparities in exclusionary discipline.

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Everyone has a role to play in restorative justice.

Restorative justice brings together the person who harmed, the person(s) harmed, and the community, to collectively repair the aftermath of harm and its future implications.

Person Harmed

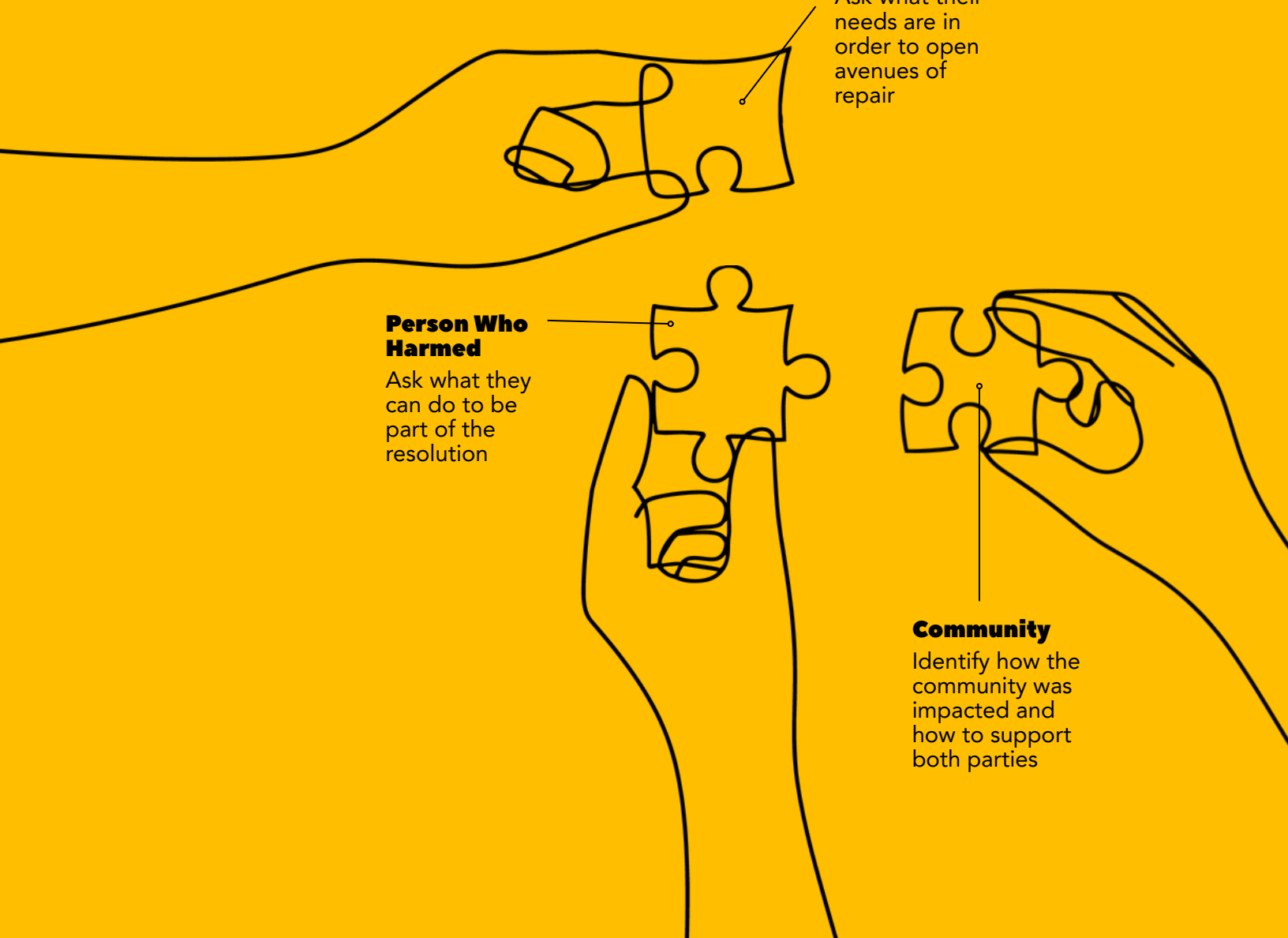
Ask what their needs are in order to open avenues of repair

Person Who Harmed

Ask what they can do to be part of the resolution

Community

Identify how the community was impacted and how to support both parties



Introduction

Many suburban Cook County (SCC) students are experiencing mental health challenges, but the heaviest burdens fall on students of color. In 2022, depressive symptoms among SCC high schoolers were reported by 37.4% of Hispanic/Latino students and 35.5% of non-Hispanic Black students, compared with 29.1% of non-Hispanic white students (Cook County Health Atlas, 2022).

When students of color bear a disproportionate share of mental health difficulties, culturally-responsive counseling and treatment are critical; however, they must be paired with addressing the root causes.

Restorative practices offer an evidence-based alternative to exclusionary discipline in schools. Studies show that restorative practices can decrease suspensions and expulsions, as well as improve mental health, social-emotional skills, and sense of belonging (Darling-Hammond, 2023). Research also suggests that restorative practices can help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and bridge racial disparities in disciplinary outcomes (Goldys, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2023).

Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) created this report in response to conversations with restorative justice advocates who shared there is an opportunity to build a more in-depth understanding of restorative practices and shift traditional discipline to a more relationship-centered approach.

Schools shoulder responsibility for a long list of mandates without the resources needed to implement them effectively. CCDPH sees an opportunity for local and state organizations to equip schools in building systems that support all students.

Acknowledgements

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Overview

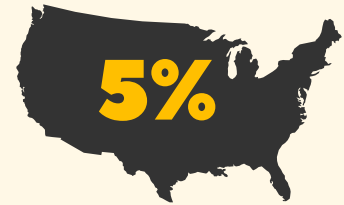
Prevalence of Exclusionary Discipline in the U.S.

About 5% of American public school students received **at least one out-of-school suspension** during the 2017-2018 school year.

U.S. Department of Education; OJJDP, 2021

2.5M

of 50.9 million public school students



Exclusionary discipline severs students' connections to school, stripping away academic opportunities while undermining mental health. Research shows that school disengagement increases the likelihood of chronic mental health challenges and the need for intensive treatment (Klassen et al., 2021). In national surveys, high school students who reported that they have been unfairly disciplined were more likely to report poor mental health, persistent sadness or hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). A Minnesota study of 8th through 11th graders found that those subjected to exclusionary discipline were significantly more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. The impact was most severe among students who were male, non-binary, living in poverty, receiving special education services, or coping with two or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Students from non-white racial and ethnic groups, particularly American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and multiracial students, were disproportionately impacted (So et al., 2024).

SCC districts rank among the highest in the state for racial and ethnic disparities in suspensions and expulsions.

A CCDPH analysis of 2017-2024 Illinois State Board of Education data showed that SCC school districts rank among the highest in the state for racial and ethnic disparities in suspensions and expulsions. Most expulsions and suspensions in these districts were not linked to student violence or the use of dangerous weapons. In fact, most incidents that resulted in disciplinary action were labeled with "Other Reason" (67.6%), indicating a large gap in knowledge about why students are being suspended or expelled (Illinois State Board of Education, 2022).

Restorative practices offer a promising alternative to exclusionary discipline. Studies show that schools adopting restorative approaches see wide-ranging benefits. One study found that middle schools implementing restorative practices reported decreases in student misbehavior, gang involvement, victimization, depressive symptoms, and substance use (Darling-Hammond, 2023). Similarly, an evaluation of more than 230 Chicago Public Schools high schools documented a 35% decrease in school arrests and a 15% decrease in out-of-school arrests, following the adoption of restorative practices (Adukia, et al., 2023). The study also found improvements in students' sense of belonging, school-wide future orientation, perceptions of their peers' classroom behavior, and school safety. Restorative practices require time, sustained leadership, and structural commitment. Schools need support to shift their disciplinary systems and culture. They also have a responsibility to stop harmful disciplinary practices and to serve all students equitably.

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the policies and practices that push school children out of classrooms and into the criminal legal system.

The school-to-prison pipeline especially impacts students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities. Drivers of this pipeline include frequent disciplinary action (suspensions and expulsions) that removes students from classrooms and the school community, as well as in-school arrests for behaviors that would be better-resolved through alternative approaches.



The School-to-Prison Pipeline and Zero-Tolerance Policies

Researchers have studied restorative justice as a way to address the school-to-prison pipeline – a framework that illustrates how students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities are disproportionately taken out of classrooms and pushed into the juvenile and criminal legal systems by way of structural policies and practices. This pipeline reveals the prioritization of incarceration over education (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008), with a major driver being zero-tolerance policies.

Zero-tolerance approaches were popularized nationally in the 1980s through War on Drugs-era drug enforcement. This approach eventually trickled down to schools as a way to respond to drug use and violence in schools. Zero-tolerance policies in schools began in 1994, when the Gun-Free Schools Act was enacted by Congress. This legislation required publicly-funded schools to adopt zero-tolerance policies, where: students who brought a firearm to school received a mandatory one-year expulsion; schools were required to refer students who committed a criminal offense to the juvenile justice system; school administrations had “limited discretionary authority to mitigate the expulsion”; and schools reported mandated discipline statistics to the U.S. Department of Education (Johnson and Johnson, 2023).

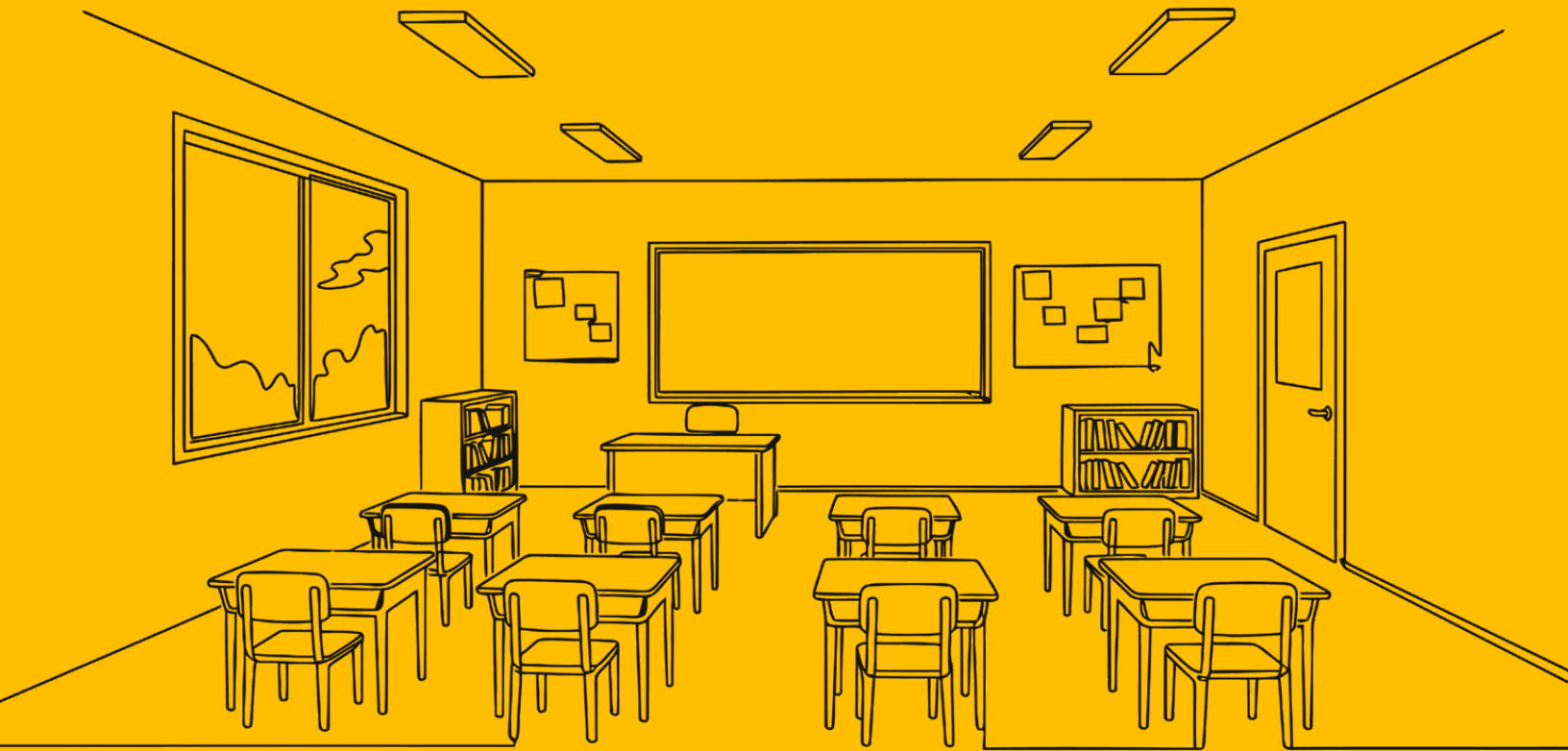
While these policies aimed to improve school safety, researchers have highlighted they are often inconsistently applied, and are not effective in changing student behavior or ensuring school safety. Zero-tolerance policies have also led to a significant rise in suspensions and expulsions, disproportionately among Black students (Johnson and Johnson, 2023). Johnson and Johnson (2023) note a “growing consensus among educators, educational researchers, and other education shareholders that overreliance on exclusionary discipline practices result[ed] from the ‘zero tolerance’ movement,” and that this overreliance is a “failed experiment.” Most importantly, these policies have further mobilized racial discrimination and disparities in discipline, as disciplinary action has been found to not necessarily be rooted in student behavior, but rather the response and treatment of Black students. In other words, there is no evidence that students of color are “more prone to misbehave or be disruptive than other student[s]” (Tynan and Warren, 2025). A study on over 300 Virginia schools found rates of suspension among Black students were over double those of white students, but it also revealed Black students were significantly more likely to be suspended for “disruptive violations,” while white students were more likely to be suspended for “drug- and alcohol-related offenses” (Heilbrun et al., 2015, as cited in Johnson and Johnson, 2023).

Increased exclusionary discipline through zero-tolerance approaches widens racial disparities in school disciplinary action and drives disparate involvement of students of color in the legal system.

Monahan and colleagues (2014) found that students ages 14 through 17 were 2.10 times more likely to be arrested in their reported months of suspension or expulsion. This finding was independent of race, sex, age, peer delinquency, parental monitoring, and school commitment, indicating that, although exclusionary discipline is applied disproportionately to students of color, increased risk of arrest is universal once the discipline has occurred (Monahan et al., 2014). Researchers have named several mechanisms through which exclusionary discipline can increase subsequent criminal legal exposure: “alienation/disconnection from peers and educational staff, decreased perceptions of safety at school, and lower rates of academic attainment or achievement—especially among minoritized youth” (Prins et al., 2023). It is evident that zero-tolerance policies and consequent exclusionary discipline are not beneficial, but rather perpetuate the harms of the school-to-prison pipeline as students of color are disproportionately subject to discipline.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	<p>Adverse childhood experiences are traumatic events that occur between birth and the age of 17. Traumatic events may include experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect.</p> <p>Adverse experiences may also include aspects of the child’s environment that lower their sense of safety, stability, and bonding (e.g., parental separation, a parent being incarcerated, witnessing family members with substance use or mental health problems).</p> <p>The occurrence of these events can have long-term negative impacts on health, opportunity, and well-being.</p>
Exclusionary Discipline	<p>Exclusionary discipline involves practices that remove students from their classroom or school environment in response to undesired student behaviors. Examples of exclusionary discipline are suspensions and expulsions.</p>
Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)	<p>The Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a framework designed to help schools identify students who need extra support. It is an evidence-based approach that focuses on delivering academic and behavioral instruction and intervention to ensure every student can succeed. The model consists of the following tiers:</p> <p>Tier 1 consists of universal supports and core instruction delivered to all students (e.g., high-quality classroom teaching, schoolwide expectations, and proactive classroom management).</p> <p>Tier 2 consists of targeted intervention. Students who need additional support receive targeted small group instruction to help them catch up to their peers and reduce the need for more intensive intervention.</p> <p>Tier 3 consists of intensive individual interventions for students who continue to struggle despite Tier 1 and Tier 2 support. Supports are individualized and may involve specialists or external services (e.g., behavioral counselors)</p>
Restorative Justice	<p>Restorative justice is a philosophy and framework that focuses on repairing the harm caused by an offense. When harm occurs, restorative justice brings together those who caused harm, those who were harmed, and affected community members, in facilitated processes to understand what happened, take responsibility, repair harm, and strengthen relationships. Restorative Justice recognizes that wrongdoing violates not only laws and/or rules, but also people, relationships, and communities.</p>
Restorative Practices	<p>Restorative practices are strategies and tools that support a restorative justice mindset. These practices consist of tools that not only repair harm, but that also proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing. Restorative practices emphasize relationships, dialogue, and mutual understanding. They also teach responsibility, empathy, and connection. These practices include: circles, restorative conversations, peer mediation, and conferences.</p>
School-to-Prison Pipeline	<p>Policies and practices that push school children – especially students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities – out of classrooms and into the criminal legal system. Drivers of this pipeline include frequent disciplinary action (suspensions and expulsions) that remove students from classrooms and the school community, as well as in-school arrests for behaviors that would be better-resolved using alternative approaches.</p>
Youth	<p>Pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school-aged children, under 22 years old</p>



The Impact of Exclusionary Discipline on Students

The expansion of zero-tolerance policies among schools led to growing levels of exclusionary discipline. Between 1974 and 2003, the rise in school districts adopting a zero-tolerance approach almost doubled annual suspensions in the United States from 1.7 million to 3.1 million (Wald and Losen, 2003). As mentioned, these policies were originally introduced in schools to address school-based violence (e.g., bringing a firearm or knife to school), but many schools are now using these policies as a response to non-violent actions, such as swearing and student absence (Morgan, 2021).

Schools started using exclusionary discipline practices to address student misbehavior and to create a better learning environment, free of disruptive students (Wang et al, 2024). However, research shows that these practices have led to negative academic outcomes across the school. One study found that students suspended for minor infractions (e.g., dress code violations, classroom disruptions) were more likely to have lower grades in science and math courses, as well as lower overall grade point averages. Similarly, students in classrooms with higher suspension rates for minor misbehaviors also received lower grades, regardless of whether they had been suspended themselves (Wang et al., 2024). In addition, studies found that students in classrooms with higher suspension rates for minor infractions had more negative perceptions of their classroom climate. This was measured through student rankings of teacher support, peer support, classroom belonging, rule consistency and clarity, and fairness. Negative perceptions of the classroom climate were significantly associated with lower academic achievement in math and science (Wang et al., 2024). These findings go against the idea that removing disruptive students will create a better learning environment and help non-disruptive students to thrive. In reality, exclusionary discipline leads to negative perceptions of the classroom climate. This creates a less conducive learning experience for all, including students perceived as well-behaved (Wang et al., 2024).

Exclusionary discipline has also been found to negatively impact school engagement. The U.S. Department of Education (2025) defines school engagement as “multi-faceted, characterized by behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement” in school. School engagement contributes to a positive school environment and is greatly linked with academic achievement. Examples include: consistent attendance and completing assignments (behavioral); liking school and being interested in school culture (emotional); and applying efforts to succeed in school (cognitive). Researchers highlight that “disciplinary referrals have been found to be associated with more negative attitudes and dispositions toward school, and lower levels of school bonding” (Skiba et al., 2014). They also cite findings of a collective 3,714 school days lost in one academic year among 3,587 African American males as a result of out-of-school suspensions. These losses were found to also predict a “loss in school engagement and bonding.” It is clear that the effects of exclusionary discipline reach all corners of a school, whether it be academics, school culture, or students’ sense of belonging when at school.

Scenario: A STUDENT REPEATEDLY TALKS BACK TO THE TEACHER AND DISRUPTS THE CLASS



Exclusionary Discipline Response or Non-Restorative Approach

The teacher immediately sends the student out of the classroom or the school suspends them.



This approach removes the student from learning and often worsens their disengagement from school.

Exclusionary discipline impacts students' connections to school and community and can lead to incarceration, substance use, and mental health issues.

Schools often understand the need for restorative justice, but don't have the training and resources to implement restorative practices.

Scenario: A STUDENT REPEATEDLY TALKS BACK TO THE TEACHER AND DISRUPTS THE CLASS



Restorative Approach

The teacher pulls the student aside or waits to have a restorative conversation after class.



This approach holds the student accountable while keeping them connected to school, strengthening relationships and building social emotional skills.

Steps teachers can take when using the Restorative Approach:

- 1 Explain how the student's behavior made you feel
Without shaming, ask the student:
- 2 **Reflective questions** to encourage thinking about the possible impact of their behavior on others (e.g., "What happened?" or "What role did you play?")
- 3 **Questions to address their needs** (e.g. "Was there something you needed?" and "How could you have handled the situation differently?")
- 4 **How they can restore harmed relationships** (e.g. "What impact did your actions have on others?" and "How can you repair your relationships with your classmates?")

The Impact of Exclusionary Discipline on Students **continued**

Loss of engagement among students not only negatively impacts academic opportunity, but also student mental health and substance use. School disengagement has been found to have negative health impacts on students, such as chronic mental health difficulties and increased odds of requiring high-intensity mental health services (Klassen et al., 2021). Looking at the behavioral health benefits of higher engagement, researchers have identified evidence that school engagement is protective among young people “in delaying onset and reducing the level of substance use... Students who showed high school engagement in early adolescence reported less alcohol and cannabis use from ages 15 to 18” (Lee and Henry, 2022).

Other studies have also found a connection between exclusionary discipline and poor mental health outcomes. A study conducted among eighth through 11th grade students in a Minnesota public school found that students who experienced exclusionary discipline were significantly more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety (So et al., 2024). Of those who received exclusionary discipline, those most affected included students who were male, identified as non-binary, living in poverty, receiving special education, or who had two or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Students from non-white racial and ethnic groups, particularly American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and multiracial students, were disproportionately impacted. The study also found that individual protective factors like extracurricular involvement, positive identity, and social skills helped reduce mental health symptoms. However, they were less effective among students who had recently experienced exclusionary discipline (So et al., 2024).

Research has also highlighted significant disparities in exclusionary discipline rooted in racial discrimination, as well as bias against students with disabilities. For example, a 2021 study found Black and multiracial Black children between the ages of nine and ten experienced up to 3.5 times greater odds of being given a detention or being suspended compared to their white counterparts (Fadus et al., 2021). In 2025, the U.S. Department of Education reported that, in public preschools, Black children represented 18% of preschool enrollment but accounted for “38% of children who received one or more out-of-school suspensions and 33% of those expelled.” Preschool students with disabilities were also overrepresented in student discipline, representing 41% of those who received one or more out-of-school suspensions and 74% of expelled students despite only accounting for 23% of preschool enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). Looking locally, 2018 data from the U.S. Department of Education revealed that “57% of schools in the Chicago Metro Area had a disparity in racial and ethnic out-of-school suspension days,” with Black students missing days of school due to out-of-school suspensions at a rate six times greater than white students (Goudie et al., 2021).

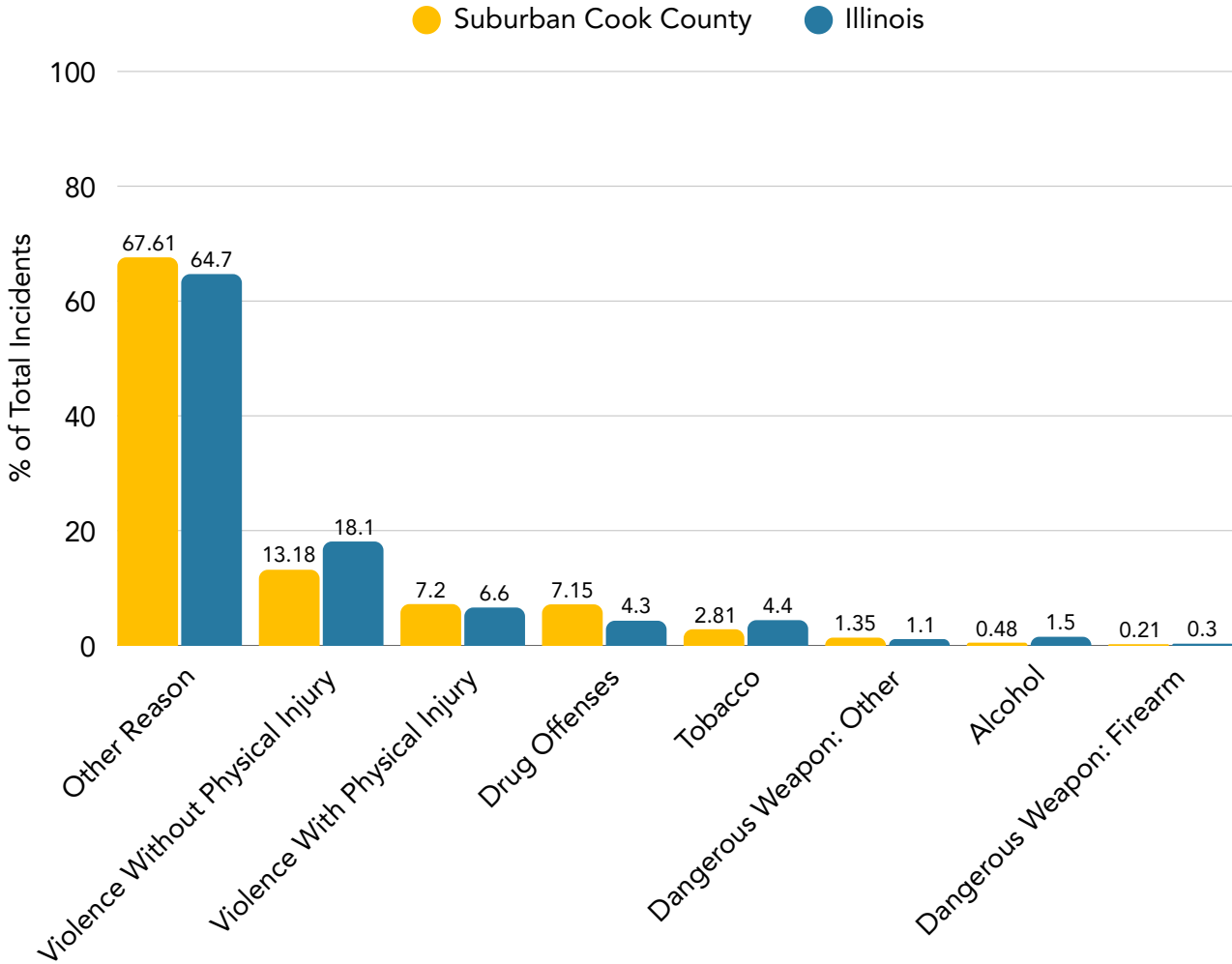
Racial disparities in discipline are a result of systemic racism, not because certain groups are inherently more inclined to misbehave.

It's important to emphasize that racial disparities in discipline are a result of systemic racism, not because certain groups are inherently more inclined to misbehave. Results from a two-year observational study found that teachers exhibited unconscious biases that led to the differential treatment of young boys in kindergarten through first grade. Regardless of their own race, teachers took more of an authoritarian approach when disciplining Black boys. Black boys were "singled out and monitored for 'rough play' behaviors even when white boys were also participating in the same activity" (Zimmerman, 2024). Unconscious biases can lead teachers to believe Black students have negative intentions behind their behaviors or are less innocent. Even when reprimanding white boys, teachers in this study exhibited more patience and leniency. Correction of a Black boy's behavior was often more punitive and would also sometimes involve physically removing them from the classroom or guiding them with a hand on their shoulder to sit down or comply. These findings highlight that differential surveillance, engagement, and responses to students not following instructions can lead to the overrepresentation of students of color in discipline. Zimmerman (2024) stresses that students' early educational experiences can have long-term impacts on their academic and social trajectories. Racism and disciplinary experiences can profoundly shape children's earliest school experiences.

Exclusionary Discipline in Suburban Cook County

Looking at the reasons for disciplinary action, a CCDPH analysis of 2021-2022 data from the Illinois State Board of Education (see Figure 1) revealed that most expulsions and suspensions from suburban Cook County (SCC) public schools were not due to student violence or involvement of dangerous weapons. In fact, most incidents that resulted in disciplinary action were labeled with "Other Reason" (67.6%). The distribution of reasons for disciplinary action in SCC is comparable to that of Illinois. Seeing that the majority of SCC students are receiving exclusionary discipline under this category, this finding highlights a critical question of what is considered an "Other Reason." Considering the severity of the other reasons listed for disciplinary action (i.e., violence, drug offense, dangerous weapon), this also raises the question of how severe these incidents under "Other Reason" are and whether schools could use other methods to respond to them, such as restorative practices.

FIGURE 1 | REASONS REPORTED BY SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY AND ILLINOIS SCHOOL DISTRICTS FOR DISCIPLINARY ACTION (2022)



Source: Illinois State Board of Education (2022); CCDPH analysis

Exclusionary Discipline in Suburban Cook County **continued**

Inequities in exclusionary discipline are happening while many students are experiencing mental health challenges, especially students of color. In 2022, 34% of SCC high school students reported symptoms of depression. Rates of depressive symptoms were notably higher among Hispanic/Latino (37.38%) and non-Hispanic Black students (35.48%) compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts (29.07%) (Cook County Health Atlas, 2022). In addition, 7 out of every 100 high school students in SCC reported attempting suicide, and Black high school students in SCC reported attempting suicide at rates three times higher than their peers (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2022). With research indicating the negative impacts of school disengagement on student mental health, it is more important than ever to directly address how SCC schools are approaching exclusionary discipline and addressing school engagement.

INEQUITIES ARE GROWING FOR SOME GROUPS IN SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY

1.7X

Hispanic Residents

suicide death rates nearly doubled between 2018 and 2023 in suburban Cook County.



3X

Female Teen Residents

were nearly three times as likely as their male peers to visit the emergency department for suicide in suburban Cook County.



2.4X

Black Residents

suicide death rates more than doubled between 2018 and 2023 in suburban Cook County.

3X

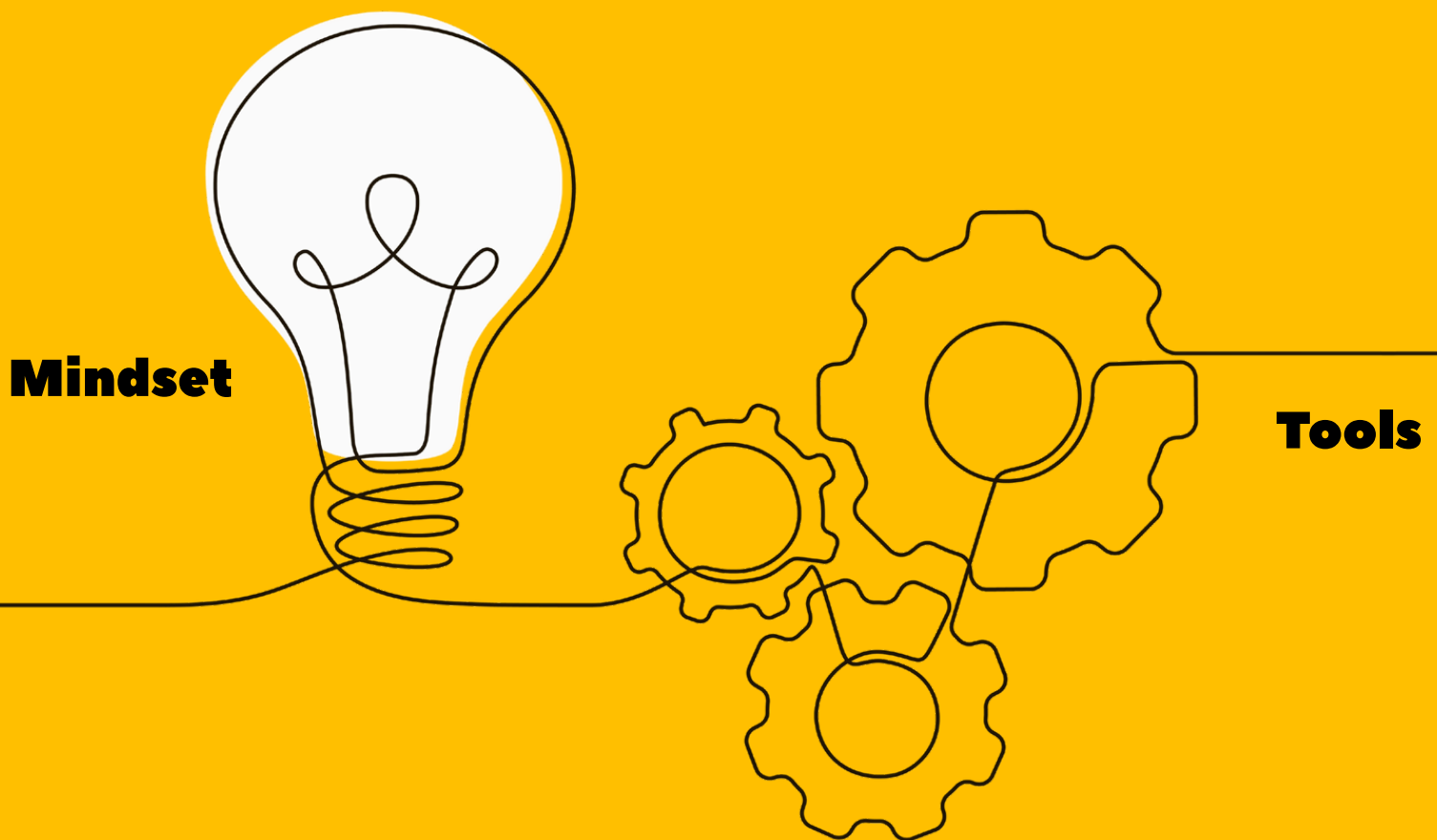
Black High School Students

in suburban Cook County attempted suicide at three times the rate of their peers.



Restorative justice is a mindset.

It is primarily a reactive approach that focuses on repairing harm. It brings together all parties involved in a conflict to understand what happened and to strengthen relationships.



Restorative practices are the tools that support the restorative justice mindset.

They include a range of proactive and reactive strategies aimed at not only addressing harm, but also **building strong relationships and a sense of community before conflict or wrongdoing occurs**. Implementing these proactive approaches promotes systemic change by creating healthier school climates.

What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is a mediated process that brings everyone together to repair harm.

Restorative justice is a framework based on practices used by Indigenous cultures and religious groups that guides response to conflict and harm (Ashely & Burke, 2010). It is a mediated process that brings everyone who has been involved in an offense together to collectively repair its harm and mediate its future implications (McCold, 1998).

Restorative justice was first adapted and utilized in the criminal legal system, with aims to repair the harm caused by a crime, reintegrate the person into the community, and promote healing for the person harmed and the community impacted (Latimer & Kleinknecht, 2000). There are various models of restorative justice that can be implemented in response to criminal offenses. Some restorative justice programs are voluntary and require participants to admit responsibility for their offenses, whereas other programs are mandated by the courts (OJJDP, 2021). Although all models share commonalities and similar goals, they also have their distinctions. The appropriate model may also depend on the severity of the crime as well as the parties able to participate (see Table B1 in Appendix B for more information). In an effort to address misbehavior among youth (e.g., peer conflict, bullying, possession of substances), schools later adopted restorative justice processes as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (Reimer, 2020, as cited in OJJDP, 2021).

What is the difference between Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices?

Although sometimes used interchangeably, the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) makes a clear distinction between the terms restorative justice and restorative practices. Restorative justice is a mindset that is primarily reactive—it focuses on responding to harm, aiming to repair the harm after it occurs. Restorative practices, however, encompass both proactive and reactive approaches. They include a range of informal and formal processes aimed at not only addressing harm, but also building strong relationships and a sense of community before conflict or wrongdoing occurs. Implementing these proactive approaches promotes systemic change by creating healthier school climates (IIRP, 2013).

Impact of Restorative Practices in School Settings

A growing body of research supports the idea that restorative practices can be an effective alternative to exclusionary discipline. Studies have found that even exposure to restorative practices can improve disciplinary and academic outcomes across various school settings.

Elementary and Middle Schools

In a study examining the impact of restorative practices among elementary students, researchers found that restorative practices led to a 55% decrease in disciplinary office referrals (Goldys, 2016). In another study with two million middle school students, restorative practices had a positive impact on academic outcomes for all students. This impact, however, was stronger among Black and Latino students, thus helping to bridge disciplinary and academic disparities. For example, “a 1-unit increase in restorative practice exposure was associated with a 7-unit increase in English language arts scores for white students and a 17-unit increase for Black students”(Darling-Hammond, 2023).

Furthermore, restorative practices have been linked to improved behavioral and social outcomes. Research conducted across 13 middle schools found that students engaging in restorative practice interventions reported more positive perspectives on school climate, school connectedness, peer attachment, social skills, and lower frequency of bullying behavior, particularly physical and cyberbullying (Acosta et al., 2019). Another study evaluating elementary and middle school students and teachers who participated in a restorative practice program for five years found that students were able to build their social skills in five main themes: harmony, empathy, accountability for one’s actions, reflective thinking, and respect for others (Kehoe et al., 2018). Darling-Hammond (2023) also revealed that when middle schools increased their use of restorative practices, school safety and behavioral health outcomes improved. These middle schools also experienced declines in schoolwide student misbehavior, gang membership, victimization, depressive symptoms, and substance use.



Impact of Restorative Practices in School Settings **continued**

High Schools

Positive impacts from exposure to restorative practices have also been seen among high school students. In a study following 1,480 high schoolers in Hong Kong, researchers examined the impact of different levels of exposure to a whole-school restorative program on bullying. Results indicated that there was a reduction in bullying behavior among students who experienced the full program or parts of the program, compared to those who did not experience the program at all. Plus, over 50% of the students in the group that did not experience the program reported an increase in bullying behavior (Wong et al., 2011). The Whole School Restorative Justice Program, a program delivered to a middle and high school district of over 45,000 students, also found that their program resulted in positive change. Over 63% of surveyed staff believed that the program improved the way students resolved conflicts with students and adults. Nearly 70% of staff reported that it also helped improve their school climate (Jain et al., 2014).

Another study found that exposure to restorative practices among high schoolers led to a 63% drop in in-school suspensions and a 42% reduction in out-of-school suspensions over a five-year period. The number of repeat out-of-school suspensions also nearly dropped in half (Fowler et al., 2016, as cited in Fronius et al., 2019). In a study where the aim was to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline among Hispanic/Latino students in a Denver metropolitan high school, results showed a restorative practice program led to various positive changes. Within five years, the program helped improve relationships between the students and their teachers. The program also led to a reduced frequency in students skipping classes and improved academic achievements (Cavanagh, 2014).

More locally, in a study examining restorative practices implementation among 239 high schools within Chicago Public Schools (CPS), researchers found that schools that implemented restorative practice policies saw a 35% reduction in student arrests in school and a 15% reduction in out-of-school arrests. These reductions applied to both violent and non-violent offenses, with violent offenses reducing by 15% and non-violent offenses reducing by 20%. In addition, restorative practices implementation was found to have reduced out-of-school suspensions by 18%. There were no findings of the restorative practices program contributing to improvements in academic performance; however, the study found increases in positive perceptions of school climate. This was due to increases in students' perceptions of their peers' classroom behavior, sense of school membership, school-wide future orientation, and school safety (Adukia et al., 2023).

Perhaps most strikingly, when examining the impact of restorative practices across race, researchers from the CPS study found that Black students benefited the most consistently from the introduction of restorative practices. Black male students "in particular, who are suspended for four times as many days as white male students and arrested six times more frequently at baseline, experienced the largest declines in out-of-school suspension days and arrests as well as significant attendance gains" (Adukia et al., 2023). There are significant inequities in exclusionary discipline rooted in racial discrimination; however, these findings highlight that restorative practices can mitigate racial disparities in discipline.

Since the 2023 CPS study, other actions have been taken related to student discipline. In 2024, for example, Chicago Public Schools decided to remove school resource officers from schools. The impact of this change on in-school arrests is unknown at this time, but this illustrates an effort to improve school climate and allow space for other strategies for addressing student behavior (e.g., restorative practices).



restorative practices
conferences
peacemaking circles
community building circles
peer mediation
restorative conversations

Types of Restorative Practices

Conferences and Circles

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the most commonly used restorative justice models in schools are conferences and peacemaking circles. *Conferences* can be used to address truancy, chronic class disruption, and other misbehaviors. In a conference, those who were most impacted by the misbehavior—for instance, the student, their parents/guardians, teachers, school staff, and the victim (if applicable)—meet and discuss the offense and how it impacted others and the school climate. In the process, participants, including students, voice their opinions on appropriate accountability measures. For minor misbehaviors, the other restorative practices listed below may be more appropriate.

Peacemaking circles grant participants a brave space to address and repair harm. In these circles, dialogue is managed by use of a talking piece, which is passed around the circle so that participants can take turns speaking. Only the person holding the talking piece can speak. The aim of a peacemaking circle is to discuss steps needed for healing after harm occurs and to prevent future conflict. Teachers or school staff will often lead the circle; however, students may be granted the chance to facilitate the discussion to promote leadership and autonomy (OJJDP, 2021).

It's important to highlight that conferences and peacemaking circles are practices that can be difficult for all parties involved due to the level of vulnerability they require. This is especially the case for first time participants of restorative justice processes. Zero-tolerance policies have been in place in the U.S. for decades, therefore adapting a restorative mindset can present a learning curve (Galetti, 2020). Being tasked to confront one's actions and its direct consequences can induce anxiety, and persons harmed may also feel discomfort confronting persons who have harmed them (OJJDP, 2021). However, that is why it is essential for these processes to be mediated by facilitators who are trained and engage in pre-conferencing to prepare participants for the process.

When it comes to implementing school-based restorative practices, the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) states that 80% should be proactive and 20% should be reactive. The focus of restorative practices should be placed on developing relationships, building community, and building social capital before conflict occurs to prevent and to better navigate conflict when it does occur.

The focus of restorative practices should be placed on developing relationships, building community, and building social capital before conflict occurs, to prevent and to better navigate conflict when it does occur.

Types of Restorative Practices **continued**

This 80/20 rule also applies to the use of circles. The IIRP advises that proactive circles, also known as **community-building circles**, should account for at least 80% of the student experience.

Community-building circles can be used for a multitude of reasons, including setting class norms and behavioral expectations at the beginning of the year, helping students set and plan academic goals, and setting ground rules for class projects and activities. They can also be used as a monitoring tool to check students' understanding of academic materials. Overall, community-building circles provide students with the opportunity to share their feelings, ideas, and experiences to build trust. It also helps them build mutual understanding, shared values, and shared behaviors. Getting students well acquainted with community-building circles can help build the social skills necessary to perform an effective responsive circle (a.k.a. peacemaking circle) when conflict arises (IIRP, 2010).

Peer Mediation and Restorative Conversations

In a systematic literature review analyzing 34 studies across seven countries, researchers found that peer mediation and restorative conversations were also commonly used restorative practices in schools (Lodi et al., 2021).

Peer mediation is a method where students mediate conflicts between two or more individuals. The students leading these mediations receive training and guidance. The aim of this model is to allow students the opportunity to work out their differences independently by utilizing conflict resolution skills to try to mend any damaged relationships and to reduce any threat of harm (Katic et al 2020).

Restorative conversations, on the other hand, involve a discussion between a school staff member, often a teacher trained in restorative practices, and a student following an incident. It includes the use of affective statements that communicate people's feelings, as well as affective questions that encourage reflection on how their behavior has impacted others (IIRP, as cited in Katic et al., 2020). Notably, the conversation should not be used as an opportunity to lecture. The staff member should use "open-ended, non-judgmental questions or statements to facilitate student reflection" (Turnaround for Children, 2020). In addition, knowing how to select the right time for the conversation is critically important for this process. The staff member involved should maintain calm and neutral throughout the conversation. If the staff member and/or student are in a highly emotional state, the restorative conversation should be put on hold (Turnaround for Children, 2020).

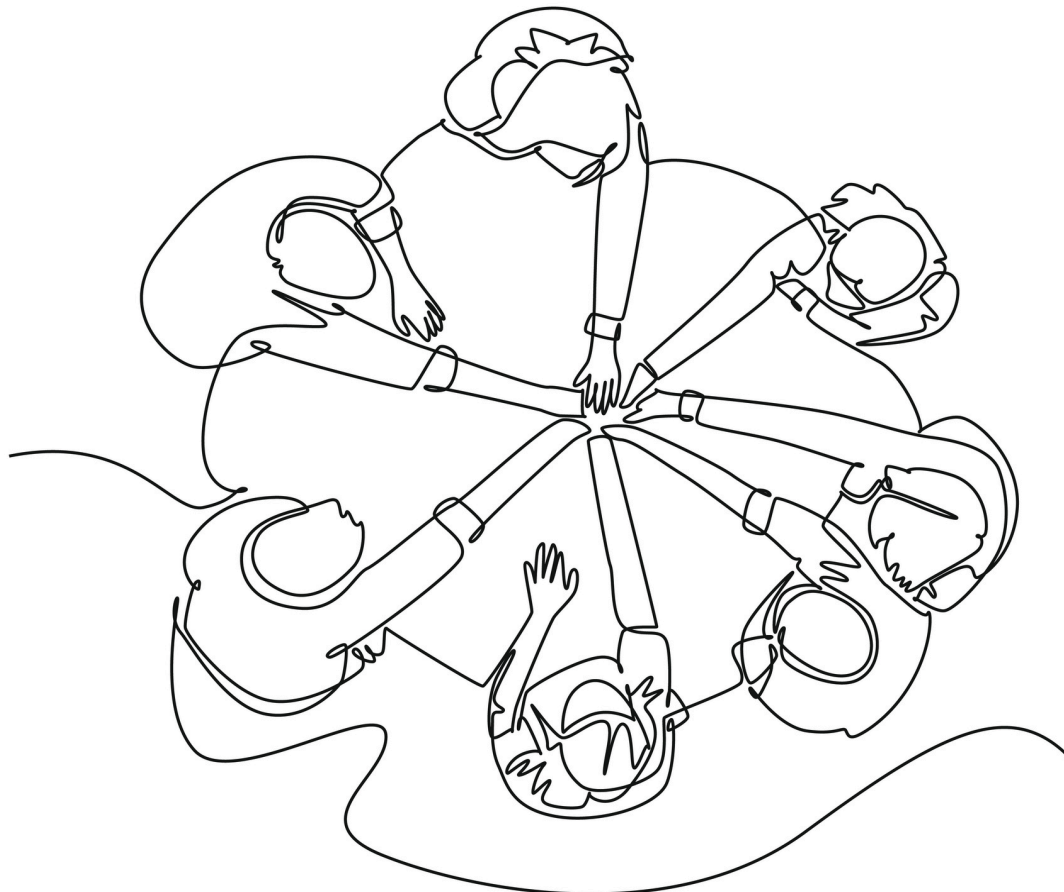
These various restorative practices can be viewed along a continuum of informal to formal practices. Restorative conversations sit at the informal end, while conferences and circles are more formal and structured methods (IIRP, as cited in Katic et al, 2020).

Each restorative practice can be adapted to fit a school's specific needs and goals. For instance, for schools already using a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework, a variety of restorative practices may be implemented at each level to provide appropriate intervention services. For example, at Tier 1, community-building circles can be implemented to help build relationships among all students in the classroom. At the Tier 2 level, peer mediation or reactive circles may be implemented in response to a minor conflict between students. Finally, at Tier 3, more intensive interventions, such as conferences, can be used in response to serious incidents (Katic et al., 2020).

Types of Restorative Practices *continued*

TABLE 1 | LIST OF MOST COMMONLY UTILIZED SCHOOL-BASED RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Proactive or Reactive?	Restorative Practice Model	Participants	Process & Aim	Application by MTSS Tier
Proactive	Community Building Circles (sharing circles, talking circles)	Students, teachers, other members of the school	<p>Process: Dialogue is managed by the use of a talking piece which is passed around. Only the person holding the talking piece can speak.</p> <p>Aim: Gives students the opportunity to share their feelings, ideas, and experiences to build trust. It also helps them build mutual understanding, shared values, and shared behaviors.</p> <p>Helps build the social skills necessary to perform an effective responsive circle (a.k.a peacemaking circle) when conflict arises.</p>	<p>Tier 1 - Core Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use at the start of the year to set class norms, expectations, or to help students set and plan academic goals • Morning circles at the beginning of each class • Before a class project or activity to set ground rules



Types of Restorative Practices *continued*

TABLE 1 | LIST OF MOST COMMONLY UTILIZED SCHOOL-BASED RESTORATIVE PRACTICES CONT'D

Proactive or Reactive?	Restorative Practice Model	Participants	Process & Aim	Application by MTSS Tier
Reactive	<i>Restorative Conversations</i>	Students, teachers, and/or other staff members	<p>Process: Includes the use of <i>affective statements</i> that communicate people's feelings and <i>affective questions</i> that encourage reflection on how their behavior has impacted others. The conversation should not be used as an extended consequence or lecture.</p> <p>Aim: Helps the teacher/administrator to deepen their understanding of the student's needs. Allows the student to reflect on their action, problem-solve, build skills, take responsibility for their actions, and repair their relationships.</p>	<p>Tier 1 - Core Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use during regular class instruction or alongside a social emotional learning curriculum <p>Tier 2 - Targeted Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use when one person caused harm. The conversion can be between a student and teacher/staff member, but also between students.
	<i>Peer Mediation</i>	Student mediator and students involved in conflict	<p>Process: Students mediate conflicts between two or more peers. The students leading these mediations receive training and guidance.</p> <p>Aim: Allows students the opportunity to work out their differences independently by utilizing conflict resolution skills to mend damaged relationships and reduce threats of recurring harms.</p>	<p>Tier 2 - Targeted Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use in response to a conflict between two peers (e.g., bullying, verbal altercation)
	<i>Peacemaking Circles</i>	Students, teachers, other members of the school impacted by the conflict	<p>Process: Similar to Community Building Circles. Oftentimes teachers or school staff will lead the circle; however, students may be granted the chance to facilitate the discussion to promote leadership and autonomy.</p> <p>Aim: Discuss steps needed for healing and to prevent future offenses.</p>	<p>Tier 2 - Targeted Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use after minor conflicts occur between students, teachers, or staff (e.g., bullying, verbal altercation) <p>Tier 3 - Intensive Individual Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use to address more serious incidents (e.g., truancy, chronic disruption, possession of substances)
	<i>Conferences</i>	Those most impacted by the misbehavior (e.g., students, parents/guardians, teachers, school staff)	<p>Process: Participants meet and discuss the offense and how it impacted others and the school climate. In this process, the students have the chance to contribute to the development of a repair of harm agreement plan.</p> <p>Aim: Allows for students to understand the effect their actions had on others but also gives them an opportunity to take responsibility for them.</p>	<p>Tier 3 - Intensive Individual Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use to address more serious incidents (e.g., truancy, chronic disruption, possession of substances etc.)



Impact of Restorative Practices by Approach

When implemented together, restorative practices have the ability to improve disciplinary, academic, and social-behavioral outcomes among students and the school community.

While restorative practices are often discussed collectively, research shows their impact can vary depending on the type of approach. The following section summarizes findings from studies that examined the impact of specific restorative practices. This review of the literature reveals that restorative practice implementation can lead to changes in disciplinary, academic, and/or social-behavioral outcomes among students. Some studies examined multiple outcomes, while other studies only focused on measuring one or two outcomes. As depicted in Table 1, a school can implement various restorative practices using the multi-tiered system of supports as an application guide. This can ensure that students' needs are being met across all three tiers of support. Evidence shows that each restorative practice type has led to distinct benefits. Therefore, when implemented together, these practices have the ability to improve a variety of outcomes among students and the school community.

Impact of Restorative Practices by Approach **continued**

The table below summarizes the findings from studies examining the impact of circles, conferences, peer mediation, and restorative conversations in a school setting. The evidence is organized by practice type to highlight their commonalities and distinctions. For a more extensive literature review summary, please see Table B2 in the Appendix.

TABLE 2 | SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES BY APPROACH

Source	Disciplinary Outcomes	Academic Outcomes	Social-Behavioral Outcomes
Proactive Circles (a.k.a community building circles or talking circles) A moderated circle involving multiple people, aimed at building community.			
Schumacher, 2014	Not measured	Not measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved social emotional skills (i.e., listening, anger management, empathy, and self-efficacy) Fostered relationship building Reduced rumors
Reactive Circles (a.k.a peacemaking circles or restorative circles) A moderated circle involving all parties most impacted by a harm, aimed at addressing the harm and repairing damaged relationships.			
Sumner et al., 2010	Decline in suspensions and expulsions	Not measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved relationships with peers Improved relationships with teachers Reductions in school fights
Conferences A meeting involving all parties most impacted by the harm, where they discuss the offense and how it impacted others and the school climate. They also collectively create an agreement plan on how to repair the harm.			
Burssens et al., 2006 González, 2012 McGhghy, 2023	Reduced days of student suspensions	Self-reported belief of improved academic success due to program participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eased tensions in class and school Increased sense of compassion in person who harmed and those harmed Skipping school less frequently Less involvement in one-on-one fighting and group fights Increased student-to-parent discussions about school Gained access to helpful resources
Peer Mediation Trained students mediate conflicts between two or more peers.			
Turnuklu et al., 2010, as cited in Mas-Expósito et al., 2022	Increased number of students with no detentions or suspensions	Not measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowered aggression (i.e., fighting, verbal confrontation, verbal abuse, name calling, gossiping, practical jokes, pestering, blaming, bullying) Improved school climate Improved teacher and student relationships Improved relationships with peers
Restorative Conversations Includes the use of <i>affective statements</i> that communicate people's feelings and <i>affective questions</i> that encourage reflection on how their behavior has impacted others.			
Cavanagh, 2009	Not measured	Not measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowered students to solve their own problems constructively Teachers spent less time daily addressing minor classroom incidents, such as lying, harassment, and bullying

Impact of Restorative Practices by Approach **continued**

Circles

Circles represent the most frequently implemented and extensively researched form of school-based restorative practices, and existing research points to their positive impact (Lodi et al., 2021). A study published in 2014 assessed the impact of a two-year proactive talking circle (a.k.a talking circles or community building circles) program among high school girls in a large Midwestern metropolis. Findings showed that participation in the program helped students develop social emotional skills and helped foster relationship building. Specifically, students reported improvements in listening, anger management, empathy, and self-efficacy. Interviews revealed that the school's principal and vice principal believed the program helped to reduce school rumors by teaching the students how to honor the code of confidentiality (Schumacher, 2014).

Another study implemented a reactive circle (a.k.a peacemaking circles or restorative circles) program to address school bullying among elementary and high school students in Brazil. Findings revealed that the program helped improve school climate through reparative dialogue. 70% of the situations addressed within the circles were related to bullying. The remainder addressed situations such as school property damage, name-calling at the teacher, stealing the teacher's belongings, drug trafficking, and door slamming. Multiple participants of the circles expressed that they felt calmer after the circles. Findings also revealed that participation led to the development of empathy and respect. Other positive outcomes from the circles were reductions in behavioral referrals to the principal's office, reductions in suspensions, integration of restorative principles among the students, and an improved school environment (Grossi and dos Santos, 2012).

A California study examined the impact of both proactive and reactive circles at a middle school that primarily serves students of color. Researchers found that the program led to positive disciplinary and social outcomes (Sumner et al., 2010). The program involved school-wide implementation of reactive and community building circles over a two-year period. As a result, suspensions declined by 87%, and expulsions were reduced to zero. In addition, qualitative data from that study found that 91% of students believed the program helped improve their relationships with other students at the school; 83% claimed it reduced fighting at the school; and 70% felt the program improved their relationship with their teachers (Sumner et al., 2010).



Impact of Restorative Practices by Approach **continued**

Conferences

Substantial literature suggests that conferences can also lead to positive outcomes. In a Belgian study involving 62 participants in restorative group conferences—including persons who harmed, persons harmed, parents, and other supporters from both sides—participants expressed positive experiences. Interviews from participants revealed high levels of satisfaction with the process. Fifty seven out of 60 interviewees stated they preferred conferencing over traditional punitive methods. Notably, all 14 persons harmed that were interviewed stated that their expectations had been met. The conferences also appeared to ease tensions in class and school. Five out of the nine persons who harmed reported feeling moderate to great compassion towards those they harmed (Burssens et al., 2006).

In a study of a K-12 Oregon school district that piloted a three-year restorative conference program, researchers found that the program was associated with reductions in discipline. In the second school year of the program, 71 days of student suspension were avoided, and 108 days of suspension were avoided in the third school year. In addition, 75% of students involved in the program expressed that they felt the harm done had been repaired, and 89% of students expressed confidence in their ability to complete their agreement plans (González, 2012).

In another case study, researchers examined the implementation of a restorative family conference program in an alternative school in Florida. The findings revealed a positive impact. The top three commonly cited reasons for students' placement into the alternative school were fighting, drug possession, and reports of false claims (e.g., reporting a fake bomb threat). While at the alternative school, students participated in a six-week conference program. Pre- and post-program surveys revealed that students reported skipping school less frequently and reported less involvement in fights. Furthermore, there was a 26% increase in students reporting that they talked frequently to a member of their family about school. Overall, 84% of students said they would participate in conferencing again, and 92% said they were satisfied with the program, gained helpful resources through the program, and would recommend conferencing to a friend. In addition, 97% of students stated they believed the program helped them become more successful at school (McGhghy, 2023).

Peer Mediation

There were multiple studies identified through the literature review that explored the impact of a school-based peer mediation model. A study conducted in Turkey assessed the impact of Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation (CM) training among 10- to 11-year-old primary school students. Its results showed that students receiving the CM training had lower aggression compared to those that did not receive the training. Common forms of aggression that the study aimed to reduce included fighting, verbal confrontation, verbal abuse, name calling, gossiping, practical jokes, pestering, blaming, bullying, and spreading rumors (Turnuklu et al., 2010, as cited in Mas-Expósito et al., 2022).

Results from another study conducted at a secondary school in Spain support the idea that the implementation of peer mediation can result in positive outcomes among students. Mediation was associated with a good school climate, good relationships between students, as well as improved teacher and student relationships. Mediation was also associated with a lower incidence of conflict among students (Carrasco et al., 2016, as cited in Mas-Expósito et al., 2022).

Impact of Restorative Practices by Approach **continued**

In another study conducted in New Jersey, researchers examined the impact of a two-year peer mediation program among Black male students in grades fourth through sixth. They found that the number of students with no detentions or suspensions increased by 13% among fourth graders, 7% among fifth graders, and 20% among sixth graders (Haws, 1998).

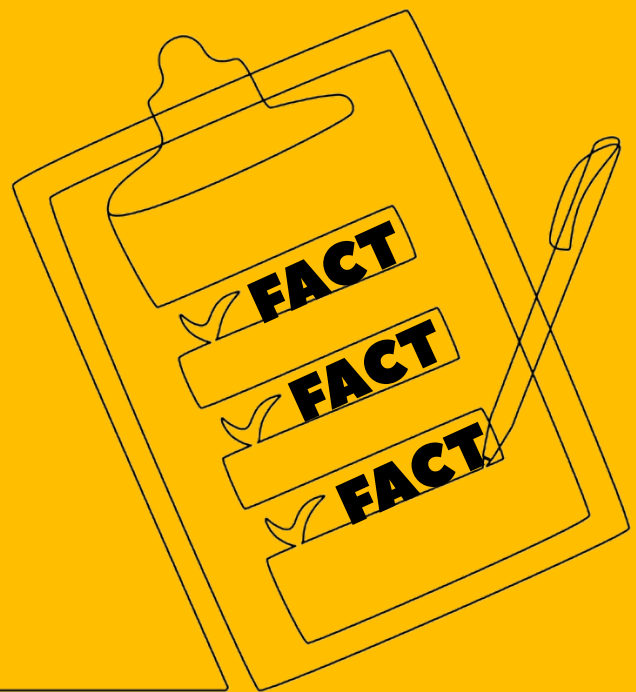
Restorative Conversations

Restorative conversations are among the least commonly used restorative practices, and, as a result, there is limited research on restorative conversations (Lodi et al., 2021). However, in a qualitative study analyzing the effects of restorative conversations among primary and secondary school students in New Zealand, researchers found that these conversations provided students and teachers with a safe space to voice their emotions and concerns. Teachers found incorporating this practice earlier in the school year resulted in less time being spent daily addressing minor classroom incidents, such as lying, harassment, and bullying (Cavanagh, 2009).

Restorative practices offer flexible tools for supporting a student's individual growth, as well as systemic change within schools. It is clear, however, that the strength of evidence varies by practice type, with restorative circles and conferences being the most studied and evidence-supported. A review of the literature revealed a disparity in available research and the need for further examination of the impact of the other restorative practices. Notably, much of the existing research has been conducted outside of the U.S., highlighting a potential geographic gap and an opportunity for further exploration of restorative practices in U.S. school settings.

Although restorative practices vary in form and focus, evidence-based research consistently points to their potential to meet a wide range of students' needs. Findings reveal that each practice holds distinct benefits. Therefore, offering students access to multiple restorative practices based on their needs would allow schools to improve various student outcomes. This would also produce a more holistic approach that can benefit the whole school, not just select students.





Correcting Common Misconceptions About Restorative Justice

There are common misconceptions about restorative justice and practices, particularly surrounding its aims and proper implementation. It is important to make these clarifying distinctions to improve the understanding of restorative principles.

Restorative Justice is Not Consequence-Free

A researcher from Morningside Center, an organization that offers schools coaching on social emotional learning and restorative practices, argues against the myth that restorative justice is a “soft” approach to discipline that is consequence free, allowing students to get away with problematic behavior (Woerkom, 2019). In contrast, accountability is central to restorative justice. In order to repair the harm that is caused by a student, they must be held responsible for their actions. Restorative justice allows students the chance to be a part of the process for determining appropriate accountability measures. It calls for the larger community to also be held accountable to support students who have caused harm. Notably, the consequences implemented should be relevant to the student and their behavior. For instance, students might be tasked with physically cleaning up a mess they created (OJJDP, 2021). Applying exclusionary discipline, where students are removed from the school community, sends the message, “we don’t want you here.” This kind of response can discourage students from taking accountability or making amends, especially when they feel alienated by the very community they are expected to reconcile with (Woerkom, 2019).

Administrators and Teachers Should Not Have Sole Ownership of Restorative Practices

Restorative practices are meant to be inclusive and relational. When only adults lead the process without including students, it becomes hierarchical and loses its restorative framework. Peer involvement is crucial for promoting equity and shared power as well as the successful implementation of restorative practice programs. Peer navigators can be credible messengers to build trust with students, translate institutional processes, and provide mentorship and advocacy. The aim of restorative practices is to improve the school climate. It is not only a response to student behavior (Woerkom, 2019). Therefore:

“

Administration, staff at every level of the school community, students, parents and support agencies should all be involved in training, planning, roll out, and ongoing implementation.

(WOERKOM, 2019)

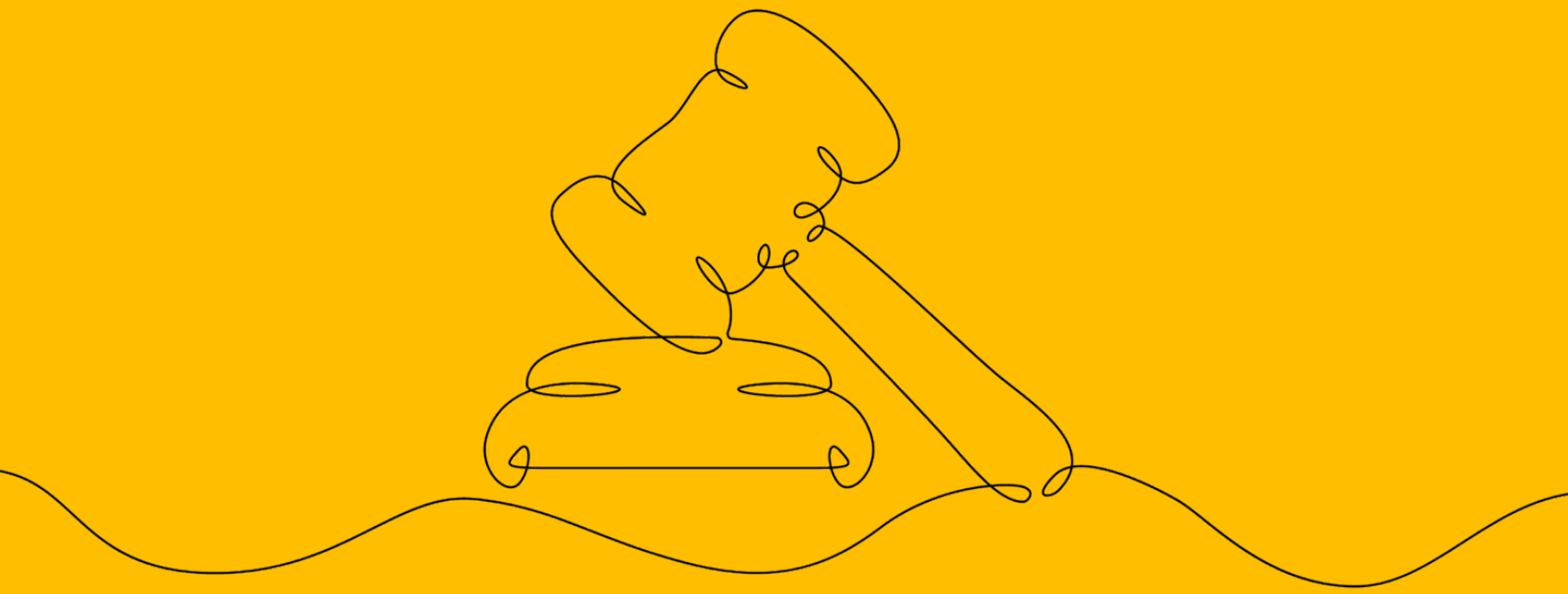
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An Apology is Not a Stand-Alone Restorative Justice Practice

According to the James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy, an organization based in Evanston, Illinois that provides youth integrated legal, social work, and restorative services, a common misconception of restorative justice is that an apology can be used as a formal restorative justice practice. Although the act of apologizing for harm caused is a part of the restorative process, it does not suffice as a stand-alone approach. Apologies, instead, are often incorporated into models of restorative practices. For example, the person harmed and the person who harmed are typically asked to create a reparation agreement on how to make amends, and oftentimes an apology is included in this agreement (OJJDP, 2021). However, reparation may also involve persons who harmed performing community service or other actions agreed upon, such as improving school attendance or performing chores at home or school (OJJDP, 2021). Apologies and forgiveness are considered secondary roles in restorative justice. A genuine apology cannot be coerced from the person who harmed, and forgiveness should not be expected from the person harmed; however, they can be a by-product of the process (Suzuki and Jenkins, 2023). The primary aim in restorative justice is for the person who harmed to attempt to repair the harm that they've caused, which is something that traditional disciplinary practices do not often allow (Woerkom, 2019).







Exclusionary Discipline Legislation in Illinois

Public Act 99-0456 (formerly known as Senate Bill 100)

In 2016, as a result of advocacy from Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) (2014), the state enacted Public Act 99-0456 or PA 99-0456 (formerly known as Senate Bill 100 or SB 100), which aims to reduce exclusionary school discipline practices in Illinois. Some key components of the legislation include eliminating zero-tolerance policies (unless required by federal law or state code) and adding restrictions to using exclusionary practices as a form of discipline. More specifically, PA 99-0456 (SB 100) calls for schools to pursue exclusionary discipline “only if other appropriate and available behavioral and disciplinary interventions have been exhausted” and if there is a threat to school safety and operations. In addition to requiring schools to only use exclusionary discipline as a last resort, this policy urges schools to offer ongoing professional development for its staff on the “adverse consequences of school exclusion and justice-system involvement, effective classroom management strategies, culturally-responsive discipline, and developmentally appropriate disciplinary methods that promote positive and healthy school climates.”

PA 99-0456 (SB 100) also promotes additional support services for students and ensures schools create formal policies dedicated to student re-engagement following a suspension, expulsion, or return from an alternative school. The act also encourages schools to develop memoranda defining the role of local law enforcement in schools and provide more transparent communications to parents or guardians regarding disciplinary policies and, if applicable, disciplinary action.

A lobbyist for VOYCE, Quentin Anderson, noted when discussing SB 100, “If you can just slot people into certain consequences for certain actions, you don’t have to think about what actually happened, because that takes time. And that’s really what our bill tries to do is say that time that seems so inconvenient—that’s really important... [SB 100] encourages folks to just look at other ways. If there are other ways available, then look at those first.”

Following the enactment of PA 99-0456 (SB 100) in 2016, NPR Illinois reported positive responses from school districts on the initial impact of this legislation on their students and staff. Some school officials embraced the law as a way to add support services (e.g., a drug and alcohol counselor to address drug offenses) and avoid harsh punishment (i.e., zero-tolerance policies). The superintendent of Springfield’s schools at the time saw “SB 100’s requirement to plan for a suspended student’s return to school as the first place to implement restorative practices.”

In 2017, NPR Illinois followed up on the short-term outcomes of PA 99-0456 (SB 100) across the state, reporting that “According to annual reports published by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), expulsions without services (the harshest discipline) decreased by more than 28 percent, and out-of-school suspensions fell by 21 percent compared to the 2015-16 school year.”

Exclusionary Discipline Legislation in Illinois continued

Looking at specific municipalities in Illinois, out-of-school suspensions in Sullivan dropped from about 700 in 2012 to about 50 in 2016. Within the first year of SB 100 implementation, suspensions in Noble schools decreased by 45%. In Springfield, the total number of suspension days across the district decreased from 10,077 in the year prior to SB 100 taking effect to 7,643 in the 2016-17 school year. Despite these local wins, CCDPH analysis shows that across SCC schools, average suspension rate actually increased from 3.19 per 100 students to 4.05 per 100 students between the 2016-2017 and the 2017-2018 school years (see Figure 5).

Despite the initial positive response to PA 99-0456 and improvements in exclusionary discipline data, many schools also identified gaps in the implementation of this legislation, specifically in support from the state to adjust their disciplinary systems. In 2024, Illinois Education Association President Al Llorens stated, "Typically, when landmark legislation like this passes, model policies and support are provided to districts. But that never happened. Instead, without proper guidance, many districts removed repercussions almost entirely. Little to no disciplinary practices, coupled with the increased student aggression stemming from the disruption caused by the pandemic means our members are being hit, kicked and bit more than ever before" (Meadows, 2024).

Public Act 103-0896 (formerly known as Senate Bill 1400)

In response to the shortcomings of PA 99-0456, Illinois legislators amended the act to include further direct support from ISBE. In 2024, the state enacted Public Act 103-0896 or PA 103-0896 (formerly known as Senate Bill 1400 or SB 1400), which requires that ISBE offer guidance to schools on evidence-based interventions and student re-engagement following an out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or return from an alternative school. It also calls for ISBE to publish "model policy guidelines for the development of reciprocal reporting systems and school bus safety protocols and for evidence-based early intervention procedures." In addition, the amendment adds "trauma-responsive learning environments" to the list of professional development topics for school staff. Outcomes of this amendment to PA 99-0456 are forthcoming, but the hope is to better support schools in implementing alternative approaches to exclusionary discipline.

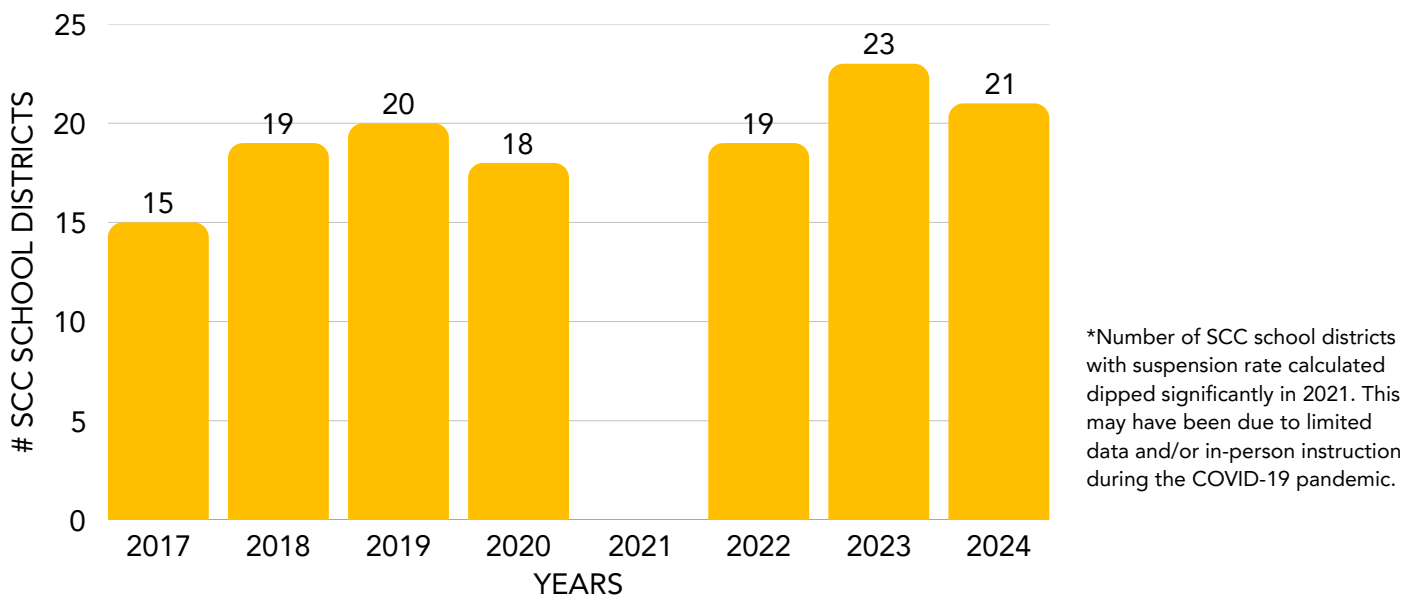


Outcomes in Suburban Cook County

CCDPH examined exclusionary discipline outcomes after the enactment of Public Act 99-0456. Required by Public Act 98-1102, ISBE analyzes annual discipline data, which enables comparison between school districts in Illinois. This includes listing school districts in the top 20% for high suspension rates, as well as greater racial inequities in discipline, represented as “racial disproportionality.” Racial disproportionality reflects the disparity between rates of suspension and expulsion among students of color and that of their white counterparts (see Appendix B). The higher this number is, the greater the disparity. The aim of ISBE’s top 20% lists is to identify districts that are turning to exclusionary discipline at higher rates and/or applying exclusionary discipline disproportionately to students of color compared to other districts.

The analysis below looks at SCC school districts and how they stand in the top 20% districts for high suspension rate and greater racial disproportionality. For background, not all school districts are considered for the Top 20% list every year. ISBE excludes districts that issued less than 10 out-of-school suspension or expulsions during the school year. In addition, they exclude school districts with fewer than 50 white students or fewer than 50 students of color enrolled when calculating racial disproportionality.

FIGURE 2 | NUMBER OF SCC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TOP 20% IN SUSPENSION RATE (2017-2024)*



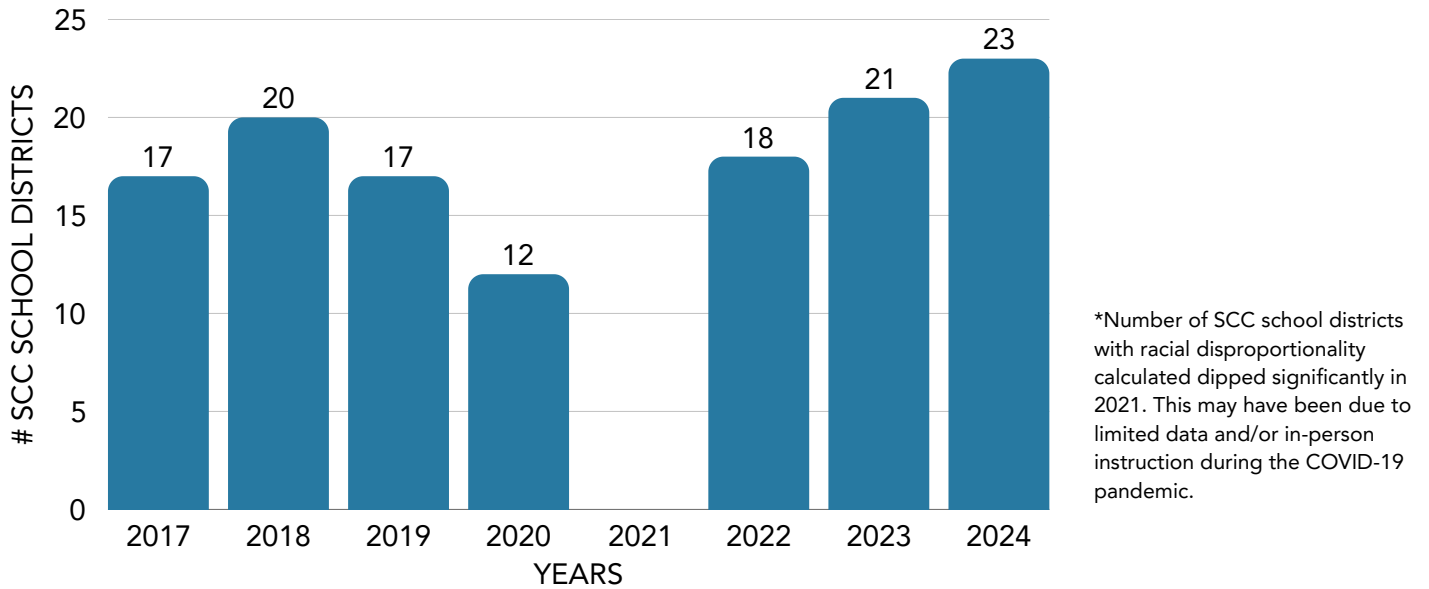
Source: Illinois State Board of Education; CCDPH analysis

TABLE 3 | PERCENTAGE OF SCC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TOP 20% IN SUSPENSION RATE (2017-2024)

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
17.4%	19.0%	20.8%	20.2%	0.0%	24.7%	21.9%	20.6%

Outcomes in Suburban Cook County *continued*

FIGURE 3 | NUMBER OF SCC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TOP 20% IN RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY (2017-2024)*



Source: Illinois State Board of Education; CCDPH analysis

TABLE 4 | PERCENTAGE OF SCC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TOP 20% IN RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY (2017-2024)

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
23.9%	24.4%	23.0%	18.2%	0.0%	30.0%	26.6%	28.8%

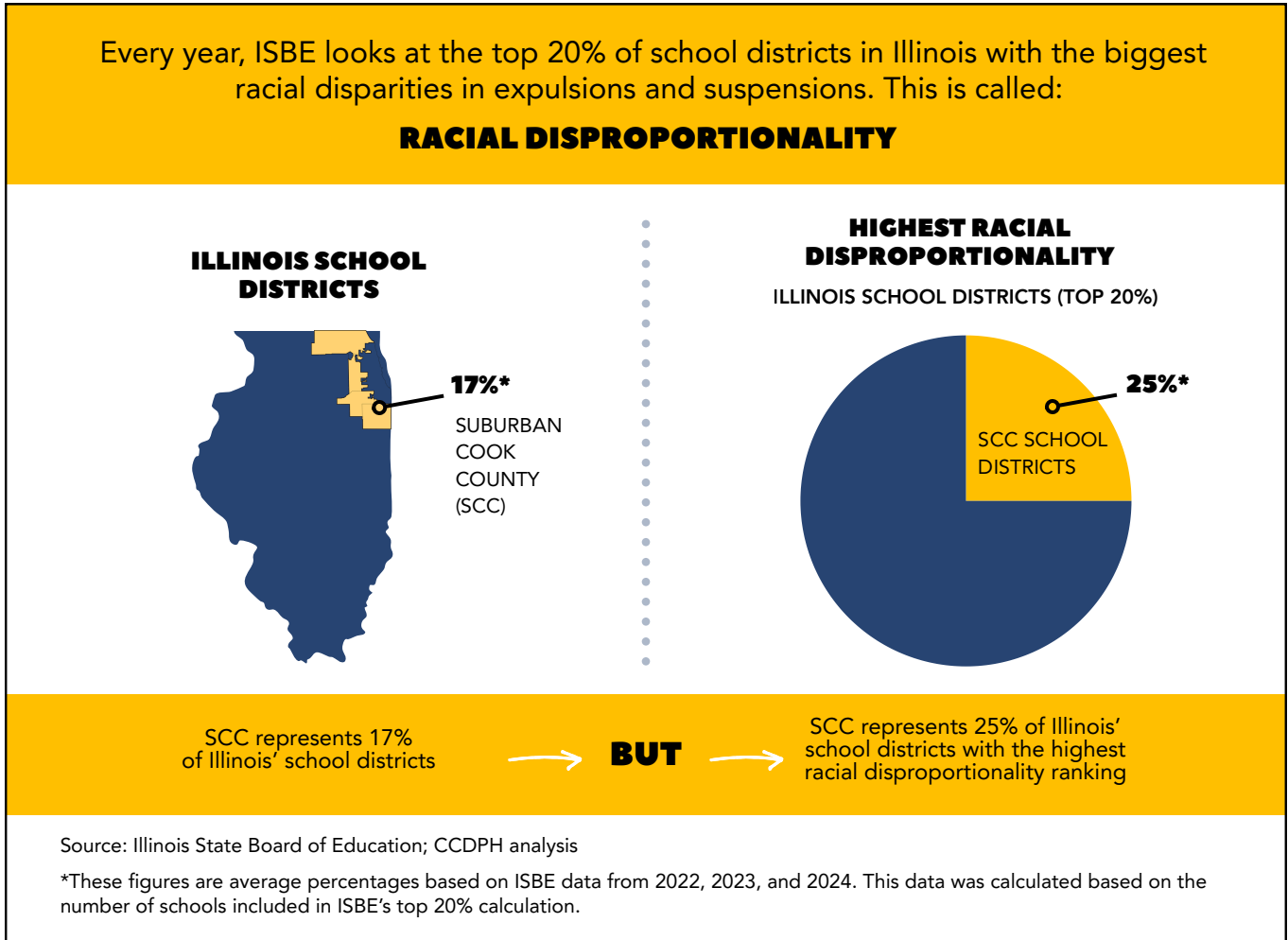
Following Public Act 99-0456, there were no notable improvements in the share of SCC school districts in the top 20% in either suspension rate or racial disproportionality (see Tables 3 and 4), indicating ongoing concerns of higher suspension rates and worse racial disparities in SCC schools. In fact, the percentage of SCC districts in the top 20% in suspension rate generally rose from 17.4% in 2017 to 20.6% in 2024 (see Figure 2 and Table 3). In addition, the percentage of SCC school districts in the top 20% in racial disproportionality also grew overall from 23.9% in 2017 to 28.8% in 2024 (see Figure 3 and Table 4).

CCDPH also analyzed the representation of SCC among the top 20% Illinois school districts for high suspension rate and greater racial disproportionality from 2017 to 2024 and compared this to the overall percentage of Illinois school districts that are in SCC. In other words, CCDPH looked at whether SCC school districts were overrepresented in ISBE’s top 20% school districts for high suspension rates and/or greater disparities in issuing exclusionary discipline to students of color (see Figure 4).

Racial disproportionality refers to the overrepresentation of students of color receiving suspensions and expulsions compared to their white counterparts.

Outcomes in Suburban Cook County **continued**

FIGURE 4 | REPRESENTATION OF SCC IN TOP 20% FOR RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY



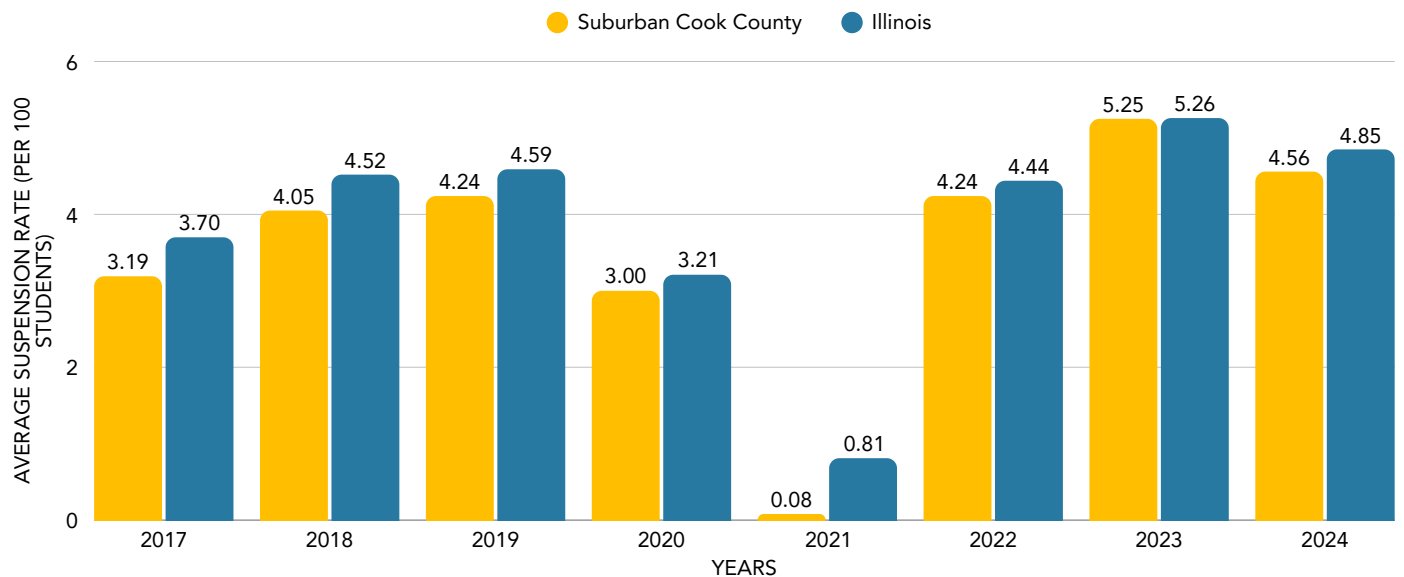
The analysis found minimal differences in SCC representation in the top 20% of Illinois school districts for high suspension rate. However, there were notable differences when looking at racial disproportionality. On average, from 2022 to 2024, SCC represented 25% of school districts in the top 20% in racial disproportionality. Seeing that SCC represented an average of 17% of Illinois' school districts during that time period, SCC is overrepresenting among the school districts with the greatest racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions.

Seeing the presence of SCC among districts with the greatest disparities, CCDPH looked further into exclusionary discipline in SCC, specifically average suspension rates and racial disproportionality. Figure 5 reflects very few improvements in average suspension rates, indicating a general rise in rates between 2017 (3.19 per 100 students) and 2024 (4.56 per 100 students). Compared to the state, SCC school districts consistently show higher average racial disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions, with the exception of 2021. However, available data from 2021 is skewed, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outcomes in Suburban Cook County *continued*

With these analyses, it is clear that, compared to the state, SCC school districts are suspending or expelling students of color at disproportionately high rates. However, given this is county-level data, this analysis is only the beginning. More analysis and evaluation are needed to better understand the landscape of exclusionary discipline and existing disparities in SCC. This may include reviewing discipline data at the school district level and analyzing disciplinary events and their reasons by demographic categories, such as student race/ethnicity, disability status, and gender identity. Considering the legislation enacted over the past several years, Public Act 99-0456 and Public Act 103-0896 both provide a strong opportunity for SCC; nevertheless, more work needs to be done to understand the ‘why’ behind disciplinary action and ultimately apply practices that reduce exclusionary discipline and promote the expansion of equitable and restorative practices.

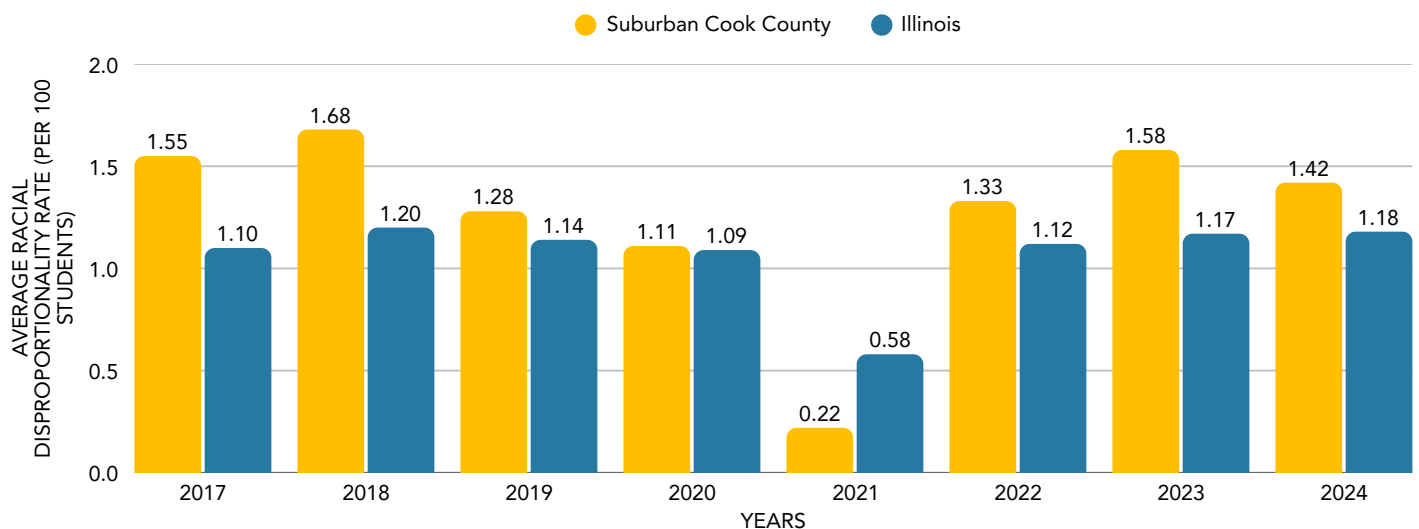
FIGURE 5 | AVERAGE SUSPENSION RATES FROM 2017-2024



Source: Illinois State Board of Education; CCDPH analysis

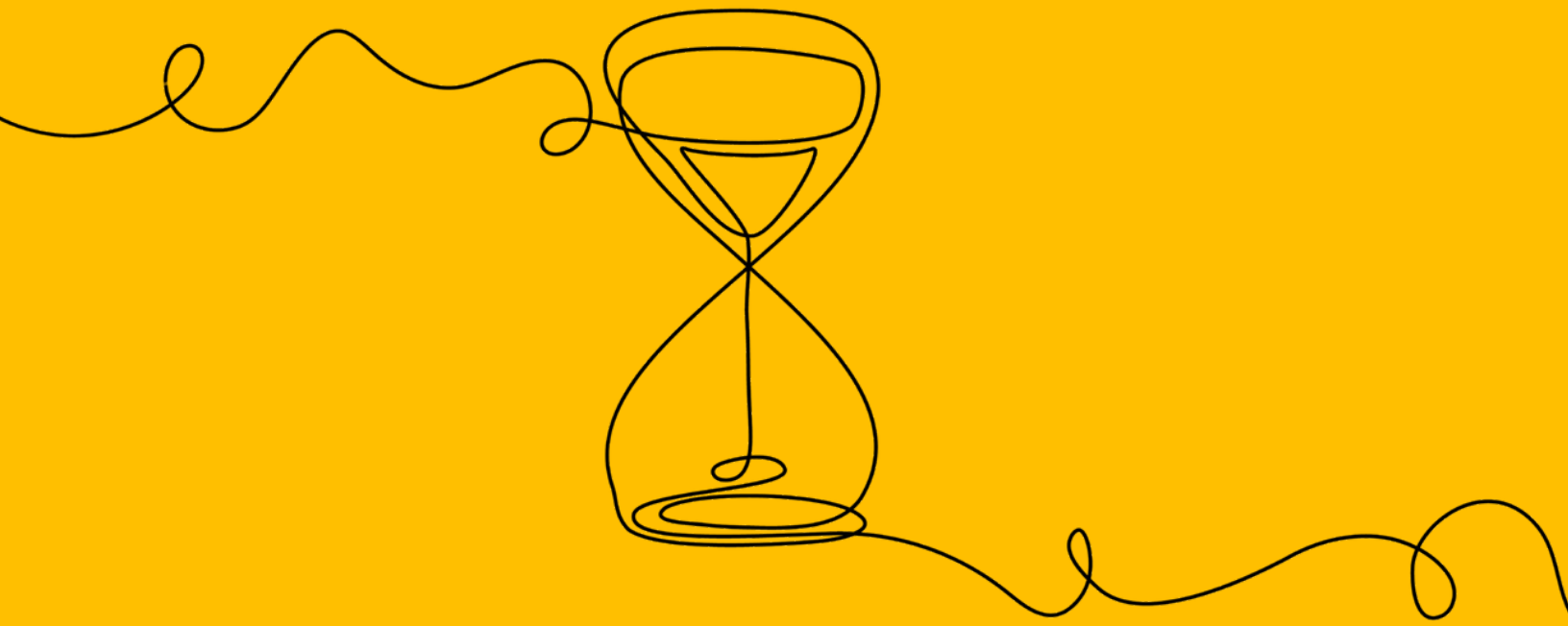
*Average suspension rates in SCC and the state of IL dipped significantly in 2021. This may have been due to limited data and/or in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FIGURE 6 | AVERAGE RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY FROM 2017-2024



Source: Illinois State Board of Education; CCDPH analysis

*Average racial disproportionality in SCC and the state of IL dipped significantly in 2021. This may have been due to limited data and/or in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Potential Challenges and Barriers to Implementation

Although Illinois has seen support for restorative justice and practices through state legislation and coinciding success stories among schools, there are still significant barriers to implementation that require consideration. Schools need support to make these changes; *and* they also have a responsibility to stop harmful disciplinary practices and serve all students equitably.

Initiating and Sustaining Change on an Organizational Level

Successfully changing an organization's culture is a difficult and daunting task, and this challenge certainly applies to implementing restorative practices across school systems. As discussed previously, the school-to-prison pipeline is the product of a systemic prioritization of incarceration over education and, more broadly, reflects a punitive social environment where punishment is the norm. While this report primarily calls for systems change across school districts, it is important to recognize these systems are working within a national culture that discriminates against certain groups and instinctively relies on punitive measures as a solution. Researchers have expressed that rushed approaches to restorative justice and practices can set back the process and cause confusion on how these practices should look.

“

‘Pushing’ [restorative practices] on staff can result in the misconception that it is ‘just for discipline’ and not a means of proactively improving school culture.

- LUSTICK ET AL. (2024) STUDY PARTICIPANT

”

Embedding a restorative justice mindset into a school's culture requires time, resources, and dedicated leadership. These elements of creating a new organizational mindset can be challenging to lean on with the existing demands among school systems. This kind of change can take three to five years to be meaningfully embedded in schools (Dworin, 2025).

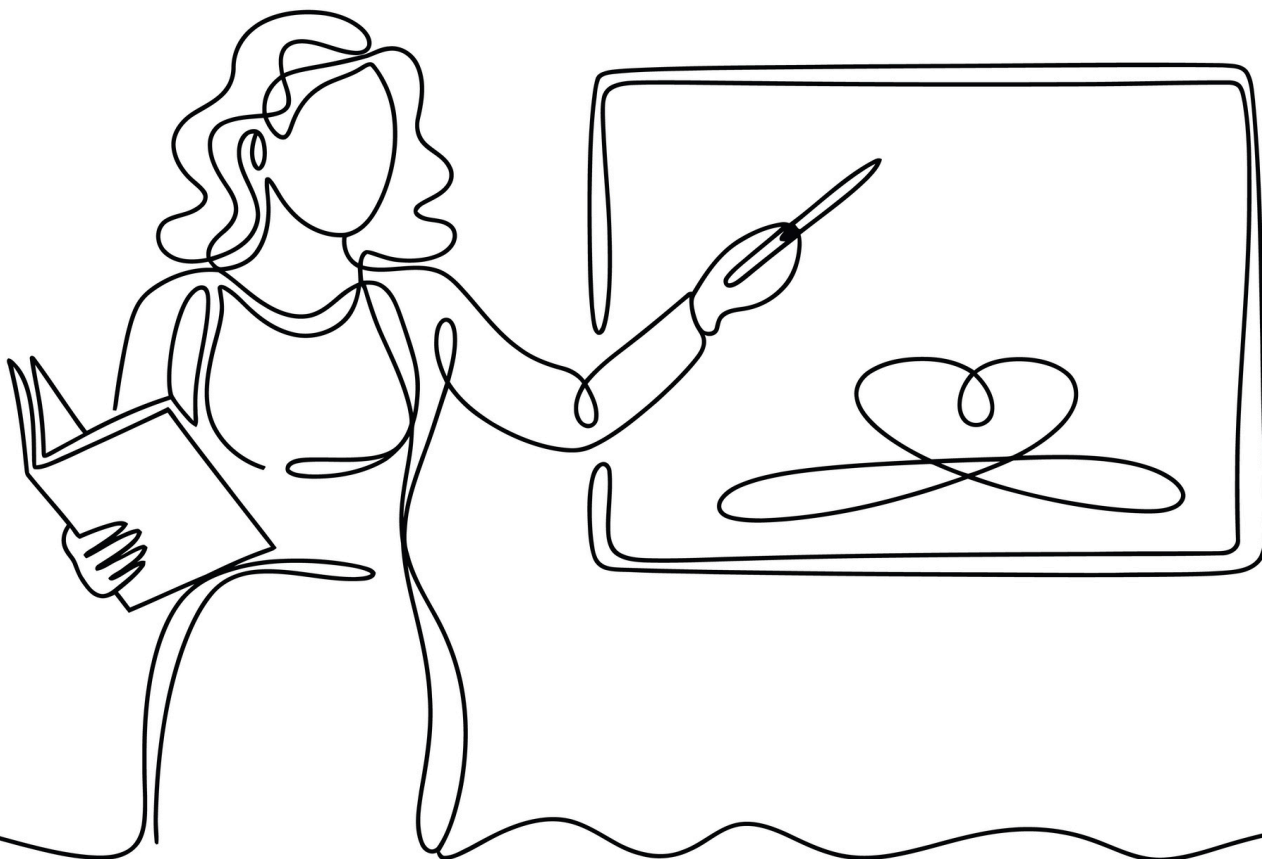
Limited Time and Resources

A major barrier to restorative justice implementation is limited resources, both in the form of time and personnel. In a 2024 study on barriers to restorative justice implementation in Nebraska, interviewees expressed difficulties in retaining a diverse staff (such as “surrogates and mediators of varied race/ethnicity, gender identity, language, geographical location, age, experiences”) and a lack of personnel to coordinate cases without burdening educators who are already burdened with many mandates and demands for their time. Research from Reed (2024) also cites a number of articles that name time as a major challenge, noting slow turnaround times between the initial referral and a following restorative conference with family. Families may also encounter barriers to receiving the benefits of restorative justice if they do not have access to transportation resources or the time to take off work to accompany their child to in-person meetings (Votruba et al., 2025).

Need for Training in Restorative Justice

With the difficulties of limited time and resources, schools sometimes seek fast solutions to restorative justice; however, these types of approaches are not sustainable or ultimately effective. In a systematic review of barriers to restorative justice implementation among public schools, Reed (2024) notes that many school administrators and staff are not prepared with the skill set to “establish the whole-school approach to restorative justice and when practices should be employed.” Even for schools that do have a designated restorative justice lead, researchers have discussed how coordinators of restorative justice in schools feel siloed in their roles, strained by a lack of resources to support this practice, as well as rushed to implement (Reed 2024).

Quick approaches to restorative justice are not necessarily intentional, but rather an indication of the need for additional training and support to achieve this cultural shift. There is an overarching challenge of gaining an in-depth awareness of restorative justice among many school professionals (i.e., administrators, teachers, counselors) and understanding that restorative justice is an ongoing practice and philosophy, not an isolated program. For example, administrators may instruct educators to hold a restorative circle with students who are less disruptive to check off a box, without investing the time to fully understand the process and create a true circle of peers. At the moment, it may seem like a helpful, preventative gesture; however, these low-barrier approaches may not foster engagement of the students that need to be brought into the process the most.



Potential Challenges and Barriers to Implementation continued

Lack of Trust

Another challenge in restorative justice implementation is lack of trust among schools and communities in the justice system and/or mediation centers, particularly around data governance (e.g., how student data is being managed) and accountability. An analysis from Votruba and colleagues (2025) notes that “some schools were reluctant to refer cases to the mediation center for restorative processes because the centers are required to collect data, and the school was concerned about how that data might be used.” In addition, there are fears that information from restorative processes may be used against youth if they encounter the juvenile justice system in the future. This reluctance reflects broader concerns about data sharing, institutional control, and perceived risk, rather than opposition to restorative justice itself.

Looking at a systems level, the previously mentioned study in Nebraska on restorative justice implementation also found perceptions of state-level legislation as “imposing policies in local communities that might not want that imposition,” as well as “inequitable application of restorative justice policies” (Votruba et al., 2025). Similar dynamics may be present in Illinois and suburban Cook County, where the enactment of Public Act 99-0456 was followed by limited implementation guidance and uneven investment in training and infrastructure. As a result, schools entered restorative justice implementation with widely varying levels of readiness. This means inconsistent restorative justice application and greater skepticism of restorative justice among both school personnel and community partners. Schools and their communities need to feel seen and supported when these types of policies are put into place.

Reflection on Barriers to Implementation

Seeing the existing challenges with preparing schools to carry out restorative justice processes and accessing the resources to do so, there is a valid concern of inequity in the current application of restorative justice across schools. Recognizing the impact of external factors and the overall difficulties of systems change, restorative justice implementation requires leadership and commitment at all levels, as well as meaningful engagement across the community. Schools need a respectful, non-coercive process to effectively implement restorative justice. Introducing a relational process in a non-relational way undermines its very purpose and risks discrediting the work before it even begins (Dworin, 2025). Considering the traditional notions of behavior and the deeply rooted history of discipline in schools, restorative justice is still considered a disrupter across school systems and demands continuous effort to shift systems and uplift student success and well-being.



CCDPH position statement
CCDPH recommendations
policy approaches
oversight & monitoring
education & awareness
implementation support

CCDPH Position Statement on Restorative Justice Implementation

Based on the research evidence, Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) believes that the effective implementation of restorative practices in schools is a vital strategy to promote positive behavioral health outcomes among youth.

Exposure to restorative practices can help reduce disengagement, particularly among historically marginalized students, leading to improved academic achievement, social and emotional competency, sense of belonging, and lower levels of mental illness and substance use.

Our schools are seeing serious disparities in which students are receiving suspensions, both on national and local levels. Suburban Cook County faces persistent challenges related to student mental health, disengagement, and disciplinary practices that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, with disproportionate impacts on students of color. Intentional, equity-focused strategies are necessary to address the inequities produced by exclusionary discipline.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings contained in this report. They were identified through CCDPH's data analysis of ISBE's disciplinary data and input from restorative justice practitioners and stakeholders, including community-based restorative justice organizations, school districts, local and state school agencies, and advocates.

Policy Approaches

1. Mandate that further detail must be provided when administrators report "Other Reason" for expulsions/suspensions to help track inequitable administration of punitive measures.

Currently, Illinois school districts are required to report discipline data to ISBE annually for the previous school year. Although a reporting process is established, there are notable gaps. Administrators can report that a student was expelled for "Other Reason" without providing further explanation as to why they were suspended or expelled. In suburban Cook County public schools, the majority of incidents (67.6%) that resulted in disciplinary action were labeled with "Other Reason" in 2022. For transparency, especially with the potential for bias on what warrants a suspension or expulsion, schools that select "Other Reason" should be asked to specify what the reasons are. ISBE could also develop additional categories that better capture the reasons for suspension or expulsion.

2. Mandate that schools increase transparency for the reasons for alternative school placements, and track when students placed in alternative schools are returned to their home school.

Currently, ISBE requires schools to collect and report data on student removals to alternative settings in lieu of disciplinary action. However, schools are also able to report that the reason for alternative placement was due to an "other reason." Students placed in alternative settings may not receive the same kind of education as they would in their home schools and may be placed in schools removed from their community without a plan for them to return. Schools should also be required to report what steps were taken to support the student before they were removed from the school community and specify reasons for alternative school placements.

3. Develop and support legislation to reduce the presence of local law enforcement in schools.

Public Act 99-0456 encourages schools to develop memoranda defining the role of local law enforcement in schools and provide more transparent communications to parents or guardians regarding disciplinary policies and, if applicable, disciplinary action.

When law enforcement is present in schools, there is a potential for a higher risk of arrest and harsher discipline for students of color, which would amplify existing inequities. Legislation to reduce the presence of law enforcement in schools would include guardrails about when law enforcement would be involved in addressing behaviors.

Recommendations continued

Oversight and Monitoring

4. Establish a board to monitor the implementation of Public Act 99-0456.

A board consisting of youth, families, parent-teacher advisory committees, educators, and justice advocates should be established to help monitor the implementation of Public Act 99-0456 across the state of Illinois. This board's tasks may include establishing a more comprehensive data collection system and promoting equitable and consistent implementation of restorative practices.

To ensure board meetings are inclusive and accessible, meetings should be conducted using community-friendly vocabulary that is free of jargon, and language interpretation services should be offered to those in need. Facilitation of these meetings should also be trauma-informed and restorative. Youth and families, particularly those most impacted by exclusionary discipline, should serve as co-designers of monitoring systems. Participating youth and families should be compensated, fully engrained in the process, and given decision-making power.

5. Provide guidance for schools on how to comprehensively collect, report, and analyze data on disciplinary practices to better illuminate any inequities based on the monitoring board's recommendation.

Data can be a useful tool in mitigating potential bias, measuring progress, and engaging stakeholders. To track school discipline, ISBE collects data on suspensions and expulsions, reasons for disciplinary action, the duration of disciplinary action, as well as demographics including race and sex. ISBE also collects data on whether a student is an English language learner, whether they are on an Individualized Education Program, and whether they are receiving educational services. ISBE separately collects school climate data, which is also partially publicly available through its Illinois Report Card website.

To better understand the impact of school discipline policies and how schools are supporting healthy relationships, required indicators can be expanded to include school belonging, access to advanced coursework, and frequency of proactive circles.

Furthermore, districts should be given space to report on the types of support offered to the students that faced disciplinary action. This may include whether restorative practices were offered before discipline, what other culturally responsive supports were provided, and whether interpretation/translation was offered to families. This shifts the focus of "what punishment occurred" to "what supports were attempted."

Recommendations continued

National data also shows that marginalized students experience exclusionary discipline at disproportionate rates; this pertains to students of color, as well as students with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ students. To ensure that all students are being represented and equitably supported, ISBE should require that discipline data is disaggregated not only by race, but also by disability status, whether a student identifies as LGBTQIA+, and what their gender identity is. When collecting this data, however, there should be a “prefer not to respond” option to respect students who do not wish to disclose their identities or disability status.

Since ISBE already collects school climate data, there is also an opportunity to use school climate data to elevate the connections between school climate and school discipline. ISBE’s Resilience-Supportive Schools Illinois (RSSI) program provides tools for mental health; social/emotional learning; trauma-responsiveness and health-centeredness; and cultural awareness, responsiveness, and equity. Data collected for the RSSI program could be further examined for connections between school climate and school discipline.

6. Continue to monitor, analyze, and share data on school discipline inequities and implementation of restorative practices among suburban Cook County schools.

Through this report, CCDPH analyzed and shared ISBE’s school discipline data among SCC schools from 2017 to 2024. In an effort to monitor and track progress in addressing discipline inequities in SCC, CCDPH will continue to analyze ISBE’s data as released annually. This includes monitoring ISBE’s end-of-the-year data report on districts who fall in the top 20% for suspensions, expulsions, and racial disproportionality. This also includes monitoring ISBE’s report on schools’ total number of discipline incidents and the reason behind each disciplinary incident. Data from the state of Illinois should also be monitored to provide insight into how SCC schools’ discipline outcomes compare with that of Illinois.

The data collected and analyzed by CCDPH should be shared publicly to school-based partners, community-based organizations that serve youth, and restorative justice advocates.

Education and Awareness

7. Provide all school staff and school board members with professional development in culturally responsive restorative practices, trauma-informed approaches, the link between mental health and behavioral health concerns, and the early signs of mental illness.

Currently, the Intermediate Service Centers offer various professional development opportunities around restorative practices, including trainings on what restorative practices are and how to incorporate them in different school settings such as during class and even during recess. School-based organizations should continue to receive support for providing professional development related to restorative practices, trauma-informed approaches, and behavioral health.

Recommendations continued

Professional development should also include job-embedded coaching and collaborative professional learning, with a focus on culturally responsive restorative practices. Culturally responsive restorative practices require educators and school administrators to be “curious about, value and respect the cultural, social and experiential differences among themselves and their students” in order to build authentic relationships (Archibold, 2016).

8. Train school-based law enforcement personnel in restorative justice and restorative practices.

To fully implement restorative justice and restorative practices, school districts should ensure that all adults in the building are trained accordingly, including law enforcement personnel. When law enforcement is present in schools, there is a potential for a higher risk of arrest and harsher discipline for students of color, which could amplify existing inequities.

9. Educate and involve students and families in restorative practices, as well as why and how they are implemented at their school.

To increase community awareness and understanding of restorative practices, school districts should educate students and families on the need for restorative practices. This can be done by highlighting the behavioral health implications of inequitable discipline policies, including how students who experience exclusionary discipline are more likely to have poor mental health and more likely to utilize substances. Students and families should also be educated on the positive impact that exposure to restorative practices can have on the mental health and substance use outcomes among students. Equipping families and students with this information can enable them to better advocate for their children and for themselves if ever facing unfair discipline.

There should also be transparency on how restorative practices are implemented at schools. Families and students should be informed of how restorative practices are incorporated throughout the school’s MTSS framework. These conversations with families and students may be had at parent/teacher conferences, parent nights, assemblies, etc.

10. Share connections between restorative practices, school discipline policies, and behavioral health to illuminate structural drivers of behavioral health and behavioral health inequities with behavioral health advocates, elected leaders, community-based organizations, and other partners.

CCDPH is committed to continuing to share the connections between exclusionary discipline, restorative practices, and behavioral health. CCDPH hopes to shed light on the importance of these types of preventative approaches and build a more holistic approach to behavioral health. This may include more strategic investments in upstream drivers of behavioral health.

Implementation Support

11. Assess readiness to implement restorative practices in suburban Cook County schools and use findings to identify effective technical assistance approaches.

In order to embark on organizational change necessary to implement restorative practices, readiness assessments are essential to evaluate whether schools have the key elements in place (e.g., school administrator support) to conduct organizational change. If school districts are not ready, support can be provided to assist them in moving towards readiness. The process should center lessons, challenges, and promising practices from communities and organizations that have previously undertaken restorative transformation, with particular attention to conditions that enable meaningful, sustainable change.

CCDPH has also incorporated questions about restorative practices supports as part of regular school surveys collected by the health department. More comprehensive surveys, like those developed by Ready4RP, could be administered to better understand readiness across suburban Cook County or in schools with the greatest need.

12. Invest in resources to support school districts in implementation of restorative justice and restorative practices.

To create organizational change needed to implement restorative practices, schools need support in the form of personnel, technical assistance, and training. In suburban Cook County, some Intermediate Service Centers provide coaching in restorative practices, as well as other forms of support. To ensure that restorative practices are fully integrated and sustainable, school districts may also need dedicated personnel to work with school administrators, behavioral health support staff, educators, and other school staff.

To the extent possible, restorative practices should be integrated into support and skill-building for trauma-informed approaches, behavioral health, and strategies to promote diversity, equity, and belonging. Weaving together these trainings helps break down silos between these approaches and provides a stronger toolkit that can support all students.

Time is also an essential resource. Restorative practices can take three to five years to fully implement and see meaningful change. Successful implementation requires dedicated staff time, commitment to continuous improvement, and engagement across the school community.

Recommendations continued

13. Convene a quarterly group of stakeholders (e.g., administrators, restorative practice coaches and consultants, student support staff, teachers, students, and parents) to collaborate on the implementation of restorative practices among suburban Cook County schools.

Creating a community of practice for school staff and leaders can encourage peer learning and problem solving. Discussions may include successes and challenges to implementation, resource-sharing, and lessons learned. The group could also identify issues to raise to the proposed statewide oversight board (see Recommendation #4).

Participants of the group should serve as co-designers, be fully engrained in the process, and be given decision-making power. Participating youth and families should be compensated for their time. CCDPH is committed to collaborating with partners to convene this group.

14. Develop a standardized process for the application of restorative practices in suburban Cook County early childhood settings and schools in partnership with restorative justice experts and community members with lived experience for all students and incident types.

Inequities in exclusionary discipline start early. As mentioned in this report, the U.S. Department of Education found that, in public preschools, Black children and children with disabilities were roughly twice as likely as their peers to receive out-of-school suspensions (2025). Restorative practices in early childhood settings could help keep early learners in the classroom at a critical developmental stage.

A process for implementing restorative practices in early childhood settings could build on existing resources (such as the Chicago Public Schools Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit) and provide concrete examples of potential responses to challenging behaviors (e.g., biting) and developmentally appropriate reflective questions. This resource should indicate which types of staff and students will be involved for different incident types and who will make decisions on student engagement and related responses.

Processes must be adaptable to the cultural and linguistic contexts of each school community and co-developed with students and families.

15. Develop district-specific guides that promote equitable and consistent implementation of restorative practices for all students and incident types.

Restorative practices should be equitably applied for all students and not reserved for minor challenges and issues. Districts should also develop guidelines on how restorative practices can be culturally responsive to the needs of people with different racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities; people for whom English isn't their preferred language; and individuals with disabilities. Equitable practices could include guidance on affirming racial and cultural identities, culturally responsive circle facilitation, and inclusion of community elders and cultural brokers. Protocols to ensure inclusion of multilingual families, for example, could include how to offer translation services for family members or caretakers that are involved in a peace circle.

Recommendations continued

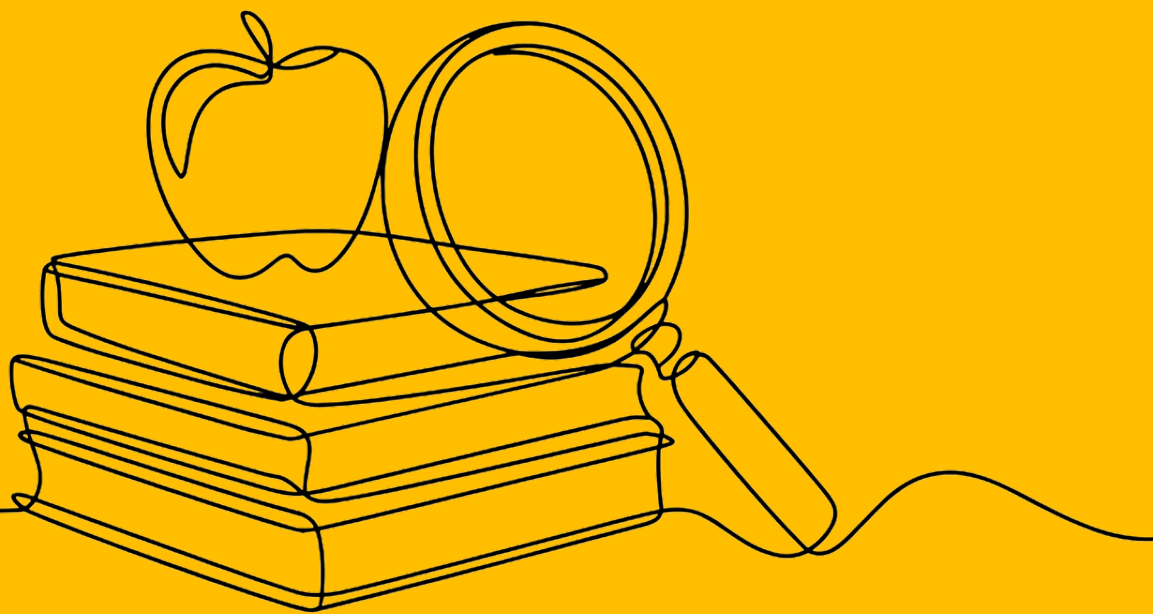
TABLE 8 | RECOMMENDATIONS LIST AT-A-GLANCE

Recommendations	Lead Organizations	Supporting Organizations	
Policy Approaches			
1	Mandate that further detail must be provided when administrators report “ Other Reason ” for expulsion/suspensions to help track inequitable administration of punitive measures.	Youth and community advocates	Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH)
2	Mandate that schools increase transparency for the reasons for alternative school placements , and track when students placed in alternative schools are returned to their home school.	Youth and community advocates	CCDPH
3	Develop and support legislation to reduce the presence of local law enforcement in schools .	Youth and community advocates	Cook County Justice Advisory Council (JAC)
Oversight & Monitoring			
4	Establish a board to monitor the implementation of Public Act 99-0456 .	Youth and community advocates	JAC, CCDPH
5	Provide guidance for schools on how to comprehensively collect, report, and analyze data on disciplinary practices to better illuminate any inequities based on the monitoring board’s recommendation.	Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)	Intermediate Service Centers (ISCs), school districts
6	Continue to monitor, analyze, and share data on school discipline inequities and implementation of restorative practices among suburban Cook County schools.	CCDPH	
Education & Awareness			
7	Provide all school staff and school board members with professional development in culturally restorative practices, trauma-informed approaches, the link between mental health and behavioral health concerns, and the early signs of mental illness.	ISCs, school districts	
8	Train school-based law enforcement personnel in restorative justice and restorative practices.	School districts	
9	Educate and involve students and families in restorative practices, as well as why and how they are implemented at their school.	School districts	
10	Share connections between restorative practices, school discipline policies, and behavioral health to illuminate structural drivers of behavioral health and behavioral health inequities with behavioral health advocates, elected leaders, community-based organizations , and other partners.	CCDPH	

Recommendations continued

TABLE 8 | RECOMMENDATIONS LIST AT-A-GLANCE CONT'D

Recommendations	Lead Organizations	Supporting Organizations	
Implementation Support			
11	Assess readiness to implement restorative practices in suburban Cook County schools and use findings to identify effective technical assistance approaches.	CCDPH	ISCs, school districts
12	Invest in resources to support school districts in implementation of restorative justice and restorative practices.	CCDPH	JAC, ISCs, school districts
13	Convene a quarterly group of stakeholders (e.g., administrators, restorative practice coaches and consultants, student support staff, teachers, students, and parents) to collaborate on the implementation of restorative practices among suburban Cook County schools.	Transforming School Discipline Collaborative	ISCs, school districts, JAC, CCDPH
14	Develop a standardized process for the application of restorative practices in suburban Cook County early childhood settings and schools in partnership with restorative justice experts and community members with lived experience for all students and incident types.	ISBE, ISCs, early childhood partners	
15	Develop district-specific guides that promote equitable and consistent implementation of restorative practices for all students and incident types.	School districts	



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Appendix A – Resource List

Whether in need of restorative practices services or simply interested in staying engaged and learning more, resources are available. The following organizations offer a range of restorative practices resources, including training and workshops, toolkits, research and advocacy, restorative justice courts, legal aid for students and families, and more.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES TOOLKITS AND READINESS RESOURCES

Ready4RP

Ready4RP has step-by-step diagnostics and process guides that help schools create a collaborative environment that is conducive to restorative practice implementation. Their survey tools, in coordination with experienced coaches, help schools assess readiness for the introduction of restorative practice initiatives. Ready4RP stresses that full restorative practice readiness depends on staff engagement; a relational change process; genuine dialogue; guided discussion and feedback; and full survey and analysis of the school campus.

Learn More: <https://www.ready4rp.com>

Chicago Public Schools Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit

The Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit was created by the Chicago Public Schools Office of SEL, in collaboration with the Embrace Restorative Justice in Schools Collaborative. The guidance and resources provided in the toolkit are intended to support staff, administrators, and community partners in developing restorative school communities. The implementation tools included should be used by trained school staff and administrators, parents, restorative practice coaches, and community members. The tools are not to be used in place of training and other supports, such as professional development and coaching.

Access the toolkit: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B18g5ywbF84_bk1nWU96OFdadE0/view?resourcekey=0-AttNLkuirAG7Rw2wvxz6Og

Prevention First Supporting Every Learner: A Guide to Inclusive and Restorative Practices in Upper Elementary Classrooms

Prevention First created a guide to define and demonstrate commonly used restorative practices in upper elementary classrooms. This guide contains practical examples in a typical fourth-grade classroom case study. It also provides tools that teachers can use in the classroom, including peace corners, sensory tools for students with sensory sensitivity, grounding techniques, and more. It also includes checklists and tip sheets for implementing restorative practices and social emotional learning.

Access the toolkit: https://www.prevention.org/resources/faaad0d0-4862-4838-8b1c-4440cb98fa38/dmh_sel_digital%201.pdf?trackid=dmh_sel_digital%201.pdf

Appendix B - RJ Practices

TABLE B1 | LIST OF MOST COMMONLY UTILIZED RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE LEGAL SYSTEM

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the five most commonly used restorative justice models in the justice system are (1) Family Group Conferences (FGCs), (2) Victim-Offender Mediation, (3) Victim Impact Panels or classes, (4) Community Reparative Boards, and (5) Peacemaking Circles.

Restorative Justice Model	Participants	Process & Aim
Family Group Conference	Those most impacted by an offense (e.g., the victim, the justice involved youth, and friends and family from both parties)	Participants discuss the impact of the harm and make decisions on how to hold the offender accountable for their actions. Participants must reach an agreement on how the youth can make amends to the victim and sign a reparation agreement. The agreement typically includes an apology and may also require a form of restitution to be made to the victim. Aims to have the justice-involved youth face the human impact of their crime
Peacemaking Circles	Crime victims, justice-involved youth, family and friends of both parties, justice and social service personnel, and interested community residents	Dialogue is managed by the use of a talking piece, which is passed around so that participants of the circle can take turns speaking. Only the person holding the talking piece can speak at a time. Participants discuss steps needed for healing and to prevent future offenses
Victim-Offender Mediation	Victim and the justice involved youth	The victim and offender discuss the offense, express their feelings, and ask questions. During this session, the victim must develop a restitution plan, which states how they will address the harm caused by the offense. Designed to help develop empathy in justice-involved youth, and to foster the victim's sense of empowerment and to address their emotional needs
Victim Impact Panels	The offender and surrogate victims, (e.g., family or friends of victims with a similar experience)	Panels usually involve three or four victim speakers who briefly share their story and enlighten offenders about the consequences of their actions. Allows victims to explain the real-world impact of crime to offenders
Victim Awareness Classes	The offender and surrogate victims, (e.g., family or friends of victims with a similar experience)	An interactive process where justice-involved youths are encouraged to speak with their victims. Classes also consist of interactive exercises and group discussions. Like Victim Impact Panels, also allows victims to explain the real-world impact of crime to offenders
Community Reparative Boards (a.k.a. youth panels or neighborhood accountability boards)	Four to six volunteers from the community who are trained to manage juvenile cases and justice involved youths	Community members and victims have face-to-face discussions with justice-involved youths about their behavior. All the members of the board must develop a sanction agreement with the justice-involved youths, monitor the youth's compliance, and submit compliance reports to the court.

Source: Restorative Justice for Juveniles. Literature Review, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2021

Appendix B | Restorative Justice Practices **continued**

FIGURE B | RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY CALCULATION

<p>Racial Disproportionality = $\frac{A}{B}$ where</p>	<p>A = Total number of non-white out of school suspensions and expulsions divided by the total non-white enrollment as of October 1st of the school year.</p> <p>B = Total number of white out of school suspensions and expulsions divided by the total white student enrollment as of October 1st of the school year.</p>
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TABLE B2 | LITERATURE BY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE TYPE

Restorative Practice Types					
Restorative Practice Type	Study & Location	Demographics & Participants (n=sample size, N=population)	Methods & Program Duration	Results	Conclusions
Proactive Circle (a.k.a. talking circles, community building circles)	<i>Talking circles for adolescent girls in an urban high school: A restorative practices program for building friendships and developing emotional literacy skills</i> Schumacher, 2014 A transient immigrant town located near a large U.S. midwestern metropolis	High school girls Ages 14 - 18 From: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Asia • Middle East • Balkans • Eastern Europe • U.S.A. (including African American, Polish American, and Arab American) n=60	Interviews of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students • teachers • principal • vice principal Participant observations of 257 hours of talking circles Two years of weekly talking circles	Students reported improvements in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening • anger management • empathy • self-efficacy Interviews revealed that the school's principal and vice-principal believed the program helped to reduce school rumors.	Talking circles provide a safe space for peers helping peers. Talking circles can be an effective strategy for developing social emotional skills among adolescent girls and can promote relationship building.
Reactive Circle (a.k.a Restorative Circles)	<i>Bullying in Brazilian schools and restorative practices</i> Grossi and dos Santos, 2012 Brazil	Public elementary schools and high schools School 1: n = 35 School 2: n = 37 School 3: n = not mentioned School 4: n = 41	Student and teacher questionnaire School observation Focus groups with students participating in restorative circles at their school Teacher interviews Unknown program duration	Participation led to the development of empathy and respect. Reductions in behavioral referrals to the principal's office and suspensions Integration of restorative principles among the students Improved school environment	Restorative Circles can be implemented as an alternative to addressing conflict and violent situations associated with bullying. Reparative dialogue contributes to the improvement of school climate.

Appendix B | Restorative Justice Practices **continued**

TABLE B2 | LITERATURE BY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE TYPE CONT'D

Restorative Practice Types					
Restorative Practice Type	Study & Location	Demographics & Participants (n=sample size, N=population)	Methods & Program Duration	Results	Conclusions
Proactive and Reactive Circles	<p>School-based restorative justice as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies: Lessons from West Oakland</p> <p>Sumner et al., 2010</p> <p>U.S.A, California</p>	<p>Middle School</p> <p>Ethnicity/race:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53% African American • 13% Hispanic/Latino • 14% white <p>Yearly school enrollment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2006 N=225 • 2007 N=152 • 2008 N=75 	<p>Classroom observations</p> <p>Interviews with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students • parents and guardians • teachers • staff • community members <p>Student questionnaire</p> <p>Two-year school-wide circle program</p>	<p>Reduction in suspensions (87%).</p> <p>Expulsions reduced to zero.</p> <p>Students reported improved relationships with other students (91%).</p> <p>Students reported reduction in school fighting (83%).</p> <p>Students reported improved relationships with other teachers (70%).</p>	<p>Restorative justice practices could be implemented appropriately at the middle school, a school located in a lower-income neighborhood that primarily served youth of color.</p>
Conferences (1 of 3)	<p>Restorative Group Conferencing at School: A Constructive Response to Serious Incidents</p> <p>Burssens et al., 2006</p> <p>Belgium</p>	<p>n= 60 conference participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 persons harmed • 20 supporters of those harmed • 9 persons who harmed • 9 parents of the persons who harmed • 8 other supporters of the persons who harmed 	<p>Participant interviews with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persons who harmed • persons harmed • parents • and other supporters from both sides <p>Observation of conferences</p> <p>11 conferences, lasting an average of 69 minutes</p>	<p>High levels of satisfaction with the process.</p> <p>Interviewees reported preferring conferencing over traditional punitive methods (95%).</p> <p>Persons harmed reported that their expectations were met during the conference (100%).</p> <p>Eased tensions in school and class</p> <p>Compassion toward those harmed (55%)</p>	<p>Group conferencing can be used to constructively address serious incidents that occur within school premises.</p> <p>It allows persons who harmed to take responsibility without being stigmatized.</p> <p>Conferencing also acknowledges persons harmed and gives them the chance to repair the harm to the best extent possible.</p>

Appendix B | Restorative Justice Practices **continued**

TABLE B2 | LITERATURE BY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE TYPE CONT'D

Restorative Practice Types					
Restorative Practice Type	Study & Location	Demographics & Participants (n=sample size, N=population)	Methods & Program Duration	Results	Conclusions
Conferences (2 of 3)	<p>Keeping kids in schools: Restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school to prison pipeline</p> <p>González, 2012</p> <p>U.S.A, Oregon</p>	<p>K-12 school district</p> <p>Referred cases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 1: n=162 • Year 2: n=175 • Year 3: n=98 <p>Sex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64% male • 36% female <p>Race/ethnicity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40% white • 27% Black • 16% Hispanic • 12 % multiracial • 4% Asian • 1% Pacific Islander 	<p>Quantitative and qualitative data collection (methods not specified)</p> <p>Three-year pilot program</p>	<p>In the second school year of the program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 71 days of student suspension were avoided • 108 days of suspension <p>In the third school year of the program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students believed that the harm done had been repaired after conferencing (75%). • Students expressed confidence in their ability to complete their agreement plans (89%). 	<p>Restorative justice pilot programs can be expanded. This particular program underwent expansion in response to the successful results of the pilot.</p> <p>The school hired full time restorative justice staff and engaged the district in intensive community based education and teacher training on restorative justice.</p>

Appendix B | Restorative Justice Practices **continued**

TABLE B2 | LITERATURE BY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE TYPE CONT'D

Restorative Practice Types					
Restorative Practice Type	Study & Location	Demographics & Participants (n=sample size, N=population)	Methods & Program Duration	Results	Conclusions
<p>Conferences (3 of 3)</p>	<p>Case Study and Evaluation of the Implementation of Restorative Family Conferences in an Alternative Placement School</p> <p>McGhghy, 2023</p> <p>U.S.A, Florida</p>	<p>Alternative Placement School</p> <p>Students ages 12 through 17</p> <p>Sex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74% male • 26% females <p>Race/ethnicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 54% hite • 25% Black • 15% Hispanic • 6% Multiracial <p>n= 79 students and their families</p>	<p>Pre- and post-program survey with parents and students</p> <p>In-depth interviews with seven students</p> <p>Six-week conference program</p>	<p>Students reported skipping school less frequently.</p> <p>Students reported less involvement in one-on-one and group fights.</p> <p>Increase in students reporting that they talked a lot to someone in their family about how things were going in school (26%).</p> <p>Students said they would participate in conferencing again (84%).</p> <p>Students said they were satisfied with the program, gained helpful resources through the program, and would recommend conferencing to a friend (92%).</p> <p>Students stated they believed the program helped them become more successful at school (97%).</p>	<p>Restorative justice, in combination with preventative frameworks (SEL, PBIS) and intervention options (MTSS) can offer alternatives to suspension.</p> <p>Restorative justice can increase school connectedness, communication at school and in the family, and overall perceptions of the school system.</p>

Appendix B | Restorative Justice Practices continued

TABLE B2 | LITERATURE BY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE TYPE CONT'D

Restorative Practice Types					
Restorative Practice Type	Study & Location	Demographics & Participants (n=sample size, N= population)	Methods & Program Duration	Results	Conclusions
Peer Mediation	<p>The effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation training on primary school students' level of aggression</p> <p>Turnuklu et al., 2010</p> <p>Turkey</p>	<p>Elementary school students</p> <p>Ages 10- to 11-year-old</p> <p>Experiment group: n= 336</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 169 boys • 167 girls <p>Control group: n = 249</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 128 boys • 121 girls 	<p>Pre-and-post test</p> <p>A 31-hour, 18 weeks Conflict Resolution Peer Mediation Training Program</p>	<p>Lower aggression compared to the control group</p> <p>Common forms of aggression that the study aimed to reduce included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fighting • verbal confrontation • verbal abuse • name calling • gossiping • practical jokes • pestering • blaming • bullying • Spreading rumors 	<p>CRPM training can increase the empathy levels of students.</p> <p>CRPM training may also prevent students, especially boys, from aggressive behavior, and enable them to handle their interpersonal conflicts more constructively and peacefully in and out of school.</p>
	<p>Pocket restorative practice approaches to foster peer-based relationships and positive development in schools</p> <p>Carrasco et al., 2016, as cited in Mas-Expósito et al., 2022</p> <p>Spain</p>	<p>Secondary school participants including teachers and students</p> <p>n= 60</p>	<p>Qualitative study (method not specified)</p> <p>Unknown program duration</p>	<p>Good school climate</p> <p>Good relationships between students</p> <p>Improved teacher and student relationships</p> <p>Lower incidence of conflict among students</p>	<p>Mediation is recommended in secondary education to improve school climate and interpersonal relationships.</p>
	<p>The effects of elementary peer mediation program on disciplinary action in the schools.</p> <p>Haws, 1998</p> <p>U.S.A., New Jersey</p>	<p>A central New Jersey, suburban, public K-6 elementary school</p> <p>Black male students in grades 4 through 6</p> <p>N = 62 students</p>	<p>Pre-post review of discipline data</p> <p>Two-year study</p> <p>Peer Mediation training lasted three days (twelve hours) with 18 students selected by their peers</p>	<p>The number of students with no detentions or suspensions increased by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13% among 4th graders • 7% among 5th graders • 20% among 6th graders 	<p>Peer mediation programs teach students conflict resolution skills.</p> <p>Students can put to use critical thinking and problem solving skills in alternative to turning to violence.</p>

Appendix B | Restorative Justice Practices **continued**

TABLE B2 | LITERATURE BY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE TYPE CONT'D

Restorative Practice Types					
Restorative Practice Type	Study & Location	Demographics & Participants (n=sample size, N=population)	Methods & Program Duration	Results	Conclusions
Restorative Conversations	<p>Restorative practices in schools: Breaking the cycle of student involvement in child welfare and legal systems</p> <p>Cavanagh, 2009</p> <p>New Zealand</p>	<p>Primary and secondary school students</p> <p>n= 96 students and teachers</p>	<p>Pre-post test, and qualitative data collection (method not specified)</p> <p>Unknown program duration</p>	<p>Motivated students to attend school because they have the means to create and maintain healthy, caring relationships</p> <p>Empowered students to solve their own problems constructively</p> <p>Conversations provided students and teachers with a safe space to voice their emotions and concerns</p> <p>Teachers found that spending time incorporating this practice earlier in the school year resulted in less time spent daily addressing minor classroom incidents such as lying, harassment, and bullying</p>	<p>Restorative conversations can create a safe space for students to communicate and problem-solve.</p> <p>By having these means of healthy relationship building, it can also motivate students to attend school.</p>

