

2.25 Restorative Justice and Improving Student Outcomes

Resolution passed 2020

Whereas, Civil Rights Data Collection reports show that students with disabilities and students of color continue to be disproportionately over-represented in suspension rates at the national level; and a study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities continue to be widespread and persistent, irrespective of the type of disciplinary action or school and the level of poverty at the school; and

Whereas, evidence points to the prevalent use of punitive and zero-tolerance policies as contributing to increased levels of exclusionary discipline and racial disparities, even while failing to improve school learning environments or reduce overall student misbehaviors and producing collateral consequences that negatively impact all students; and

Whereas, every absence is a learning opportunity lost and can have long-term impacts on student success in school. Recent state data shows disproportionate rates of student discipline and exclusion related to race, income, and special need; and

Whereas, in the context of the school system, restorative justice is a set of promising evidenced-based practices that includes preventative as well as responsive strategies to create opportunities for social emotional learning, foster a school-wide culture of relationship-based accountability, and provide alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices, and research indicates that restorative justice practices are most effective when embedded within a school-wide philosophy and approach; and

Whereas, the goals of a restorative approach in schools are accountability, community safety, and competency development; and

Whereas, the three pillars of restorative justice require that we address harms and needs, hold people who harm accountable, and require an obligation to address the harm; and restorative justice programs involve all aspects of the community: students, schools, and the community of parents, guardians and social-emotional support systems; and

Whereas, community-based restorative justice efforts are largely focused on the goal of providing alternative approaches to practices that perpetuate injustices within existing power structures, and eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline seen in incarceration and exclusionary discipline rates; and

Whereas, common outcomes associated with restorative justice initiatives primarily include reductions in suspensions, expulsions, and discipline referrals; additionally include a reduction in law enforcement involvement, improved social skills, and school engagement; and hold the potential for improving student-teacher relationships, creating positive school climates, and reducing racial disparities in school discipline practices.

Therefore, be it

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate to replace exclusionary discipline and language whenever possible with evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive behavior best practices and promising strategies such as:

- Restorative justice
- Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and behavioral frameworks
- Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS)
- De-escalation techniques, ongoing training, and follow-up services
- Social emotional learning (SEL) instruction
- Trauma-informed practices and healing-centered engagement
- Professional development on unconscious/implicit bias, cultural competence, social emotional learning, and school-to-prison pipeline impacts of disparities in discipline for educators and administrators, including academic and disciplinary intervention staff; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will support restorative justice initiatives that encourage school leaders to create buy-in by involving students, families, community members, and staff to:

- Co-create restorative justice pilots, initiatives, practices, and implementation
- Identify specific behaviors represented in exclusionary discipline data that can alternatively be referred to restorative justice practices
- Integrate restorative justice language into district discipline policies, office referral policies, and classroom instruction to encourage the systemic adoption of restorative practices
- Develop a district-wide restorative justice training program that can support consistent and frequent ongoing training for all staff
- Integrate student voice in school-wide implementation
- Partner with local law enforcement and juvenile courts to integrate restorative justice into diversion processes; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate for consistent statewide collaborative partnerships between trained juvenile justice decision-makers, educators, and other stakeholders to reduce risk of involvement in the criminal justice system while also increasing student engagement in schools.