

RESTORATIVE SCHOOLS

CREATING A RESTORATIVE CULTURE SHIFT IN SCHOOLS

Recommendations for Schools and Communities



**Peacebuilders
Canada**

Youth Justice. Restorative Justice. Social Justice.

May 2019



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About Peacebuilders

Peacebuilders is a charitable non-profit organization based in Toronto that provides programs and services to youth in conflict. We use restorative practices to keep youth out of the criminal justice system, make schools safer for learning and development, and build strong and healthy communities.

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INTRODUCTION

“Suspension removes the student and focuses on the behaviour. It doesn’t deal with the underlying issues.”

-Superintendent

Purpose of this report

This document serves as a resource for building a “restorative school.” We begin by clarifying what we mean by “restorative schools”—defining the key terms, identifying current policies and practices, and presenting our own examples. We then outline the challenges, benefits, and conditions for success—including the various issues facing youth-serving agencies working within the education system—and provide recommendations to those working within the youth sector to use restorative practices to improve outcomes for young people.

This document is part of the Restorative Schools Early Diversion Pilot Project, which brought together various partners and stakeholders in the youth justice and education systems to develop a framework for changing the way we respond to and understand school-based conflict and adolescent misbehaviour.

About the Restorative Schools Early Diversion Pilot Project

A three-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation Youth Opportunities Fund provided Peacebuilders with the opportunity to partner with Justice for Children and Youth, the Toronto District School Board, and the Toronto Police Service to develop, implement and evaluate an early diversion framework for Toronto high schools. Funded through the Strategic Collaborations stream, we sought to learn how stakeholders could work together to develop a model that embeds restorative practices in high schools to prevent and intervene in school-based conflict, as an alternative to laying criminal charges.

The framework was piloted at Eastdale Collegiate Institute and Central Technical School from September 2017 to January 2019. As the project evolved over three years, we learned that achieving systemic change requires not only focusing on policies, but also looking at how policies are put into practice. Over the last two decades, the policies needed to implement restorative practices have been established by the Ministry of Education and Toronto District School Board. Now it is up to those working with and within the education system to change the way they think about young people and why young people misbehave, in order to change the way we respond to adolescent misbehaviour. This report focused on how to create a culture shift within schools in order to work towards lasting and sustainable impact in the education system.



“Restorative practices give everyone the opportunity to talk and learn more about each other.”

-Student, Grade 12, Eastdale Collegiate Institute

Advisory Council

Many individuals and organizations provided feedback and expertise as we developed the framework and recommendations for the Restorative Schools Early Diversion Pilot Project, including:

- Toronto District School Board (TDSB)
- Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY)
- St. Stephen’s Community House
- Peacebuilders’ Youth Advisory
- City of Toronto
- Supporting the East End Neighbourhoods (SEEN) Collaborative
- Toronto Youth Cabinet
- The ReDesign Group
- Toronto Police Service (TPS)
- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)

The purpose of the Advisory Council was to:

- 1. Identify barriers to positive outcomes for youth in the youth justice and education systems;**
- 2. Identify conditions for successful culture change in the education system, specifically as it relates to the school-to-prison pipeline;**
- 3. Provide recommendations to stakeholders, including school boards, schools, and youth-serving organizations.**

“Restorative practices should be in every school because it resolves the actual problem and would save it from escalating and decreases student stress and drama.”

-Student. Grade 11, Eastdale Collegiate Institute

The Advisory Council was representative of the diverse institutions and people that make up the education and justice systems, including high-school students, various levels of the Toronto District School Board, police, community organizations, and justice professionals. Together, we identified the myriad challenges and barriers of working within these systems, identified conditions for success, and provided recommendations for moving forward.

Although representatives of TPS and MCCSS participated in visioning the initial project, after the grant application was approved, internal shifts at TPS and MCCSS meant that new individuals joined the Advisory Council. These new members did not have the same level of interest or involvement as their predecessors. This made it difficult to ensure that all stakeholders were meaningfully involved, and limited our engagement. Establishing clear Terms of Reference and specific roles for Advisory Council members at the beginning would have helped stakeholders understand the purpose of the advisory and their role within it.

Nevertheless, the Advisory Council and the funder, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, were flexible and adaptive as the project evolved and as new issues were identified. Without this diverse group of voices, we would not have been able to identify the learnings and opportunities that are described in this report.



BACKGROUND

Research shows that exclusionary school policies, such as suspensions and expulsions, increase the likelihood of youth engaging in criminal activity and interacting with the justice system.

The relationship between school disciplinary policies and the youth justice system has long been recognized. In this section, we summarize the more recent history of youth justice and education policies in Toronto and its impact on youth well-being. This section provides an overview of issues and policies.

Intersecting systems: youth justice and education

One of the main goals of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) was to decrease the use of courts and custody through supportive interventions and programming. Instead of charging youth, the YCJA encourages police to refer young people to community-based programs designed to hold them accountable for their actions. Since the YCJA was introduced in 2003, the number of youth incarcerated has decreased by over 70%.¹ However, up until 2017, Toronto was the only jurisdiction in Ontario that did not have a centrally coordinated pre-charge diversion program. Before this time, some police were referring young people to programs, but the majority of police were not referring at all or were referring on an ad hoc basis.

As a result, one of the first goals of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES), established in 2014, was to “investigate the resources needed to deliver, and then implement a city-wide pre-charge diversion program to provide supportive interventions and programming as an alternative to criminal charges.”² TYES held numerous consultations throughout the city, and in 2015, published a Pre-Charge Diversion report. Peacebuilders participated in the TYES consultations, as well as the consultations held by the City of Toronto after publication. Both the TYES report and the follow-up consultations identified the education system to be both a protective factor and a risk factor for youth involvement in the justice system—that is, school has the potential to prevent youth from getting involved in crime and violence, but school can also contribute to existing psychological, social, and economic risk factors for vulnerable young people.

The school-to-prison pipeline

Research shows that exclusionary school policies, such as suspensions and/or expulsions, increase the likelihood of youth engaging in criminal activity and of youth interacting with the justice system—a phenomenon known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.”³ Exclusion from school is widely recognized as a driver for wider social exclusion and highly correlated with unemployment and involvement in crime.

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20% of
suspensions/
expulsions from
the TDSB
involve police.

Black and
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as their white
peers.

Strict disciplinary policies have not only been proven to be ineffective, they are also inequitable: Black and racialized students are three times more likely to be suspended for the same behaviours as their white peers,⁴ and students with special education needs represent more than 50% of suspensions/expulsions annually.⁵ Furthermore, many high schools in Toronto draw students from across the city. Inter-community tensions and conflicts can easily enter the schools grounds and contribute to student violence and victimization.

Approximately 20% of suspensions/expulsions from the TDSB involve police.⁶ The Toronto Police Service and the Ontario Courts of Justice do not share statistics on school-based violence; however, we know from 15 years' experience running youth court-diversion programs in Toronto that school-based conflict make up a significant number of the charges that end up in court.

“Safe Schools” and “zero-tolerance policies”

In the early 2000s, the Harris-led Conservative government introduced the Safe Schools Act, which expanded the authority for suspensions and expulsions to teachers (an authority previously only held by principals), created provisions for mandatory suspensions and expulsions, and required mandatory police involvement for certain infractions.⁷ This “zero-tolerance” regime profoundly changed the educational landscape.

And it wasn't unique to Ontario. All over North America, school systems were enforcing zero-tolerance policies that required mandatory suspensions for certain behaviours—communicating to educators that any kind of student misbehavior would not be tolerated. During this time, incidents that once may have warranted a phone call home, like pushing another student or cursing, were increasingly common grounds for suspension. Both the number of suspensions and expulsions dramatically increased as a result.

The implementation of zero tolerance policies across North America led to a body of research that clearly demonstrates the failure of this approach to discipline.⁸ Furthermore, much research shows that suspensions and expulsions are inequitable. In reality, the Safe Schools Act and other zero tolerance policies systematically discriminated against students of colour.⁹

In 2003, in response to concerns raised by students, parents, and activists from racialized communities in Ontario, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) launched a formal investigation into the application of zero-tolerance policies in Ontario. The investigation concluded that the Safe Schools Act was disproportionately impacting students of colour, particularly Black, Indigenous Tamil and Latino students, as well as students with disabilities in Ontario.¹⁰ Based on these conclusions, the OHRC filed human rights complaints against the TDSB and the Ministry of Education. Settlements were reached in 2005 and 2007

“Restorative practices are a good alternate to suspension. While it didn’t correct the behaviour, it built stronger relationships with the staff that the young person was in conflict with... and helps adults to understand the *why* behind the behaviour.”
- Vice Principal,
Eastdale Collegiate
Institute

respectively, in which parties were counseled to examine and implement alternative measures for achieving school safety that do not discriminate against racialized students and students with disabilities.

Progressive discipline

On February 1, 2008, the Ministry of Education Bill 212, the Ontario Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety) came into effect. Instead of mandating punitive consequences, the amendment introduced a graduated disciplinary model, which follows a continuum of interventions designed to support students, not exclude them.

In 2013, The TDSB adopted a similar policy, Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour, in accordance with the Education Act.¹¹ The policy defines “progressive discipline” as a “whole-school approach that utilizes a continuum of interventions, supports, and consequences to address inappropriate behaviour and to build upon strategies that promote positive behaviours. When inappropriate behaviour occurs, disciplinary measures should be applied within a framework that shifts the focus from one that is solely punitive to a focus that is both corrective and supportive.” In other words, the policy requires educators to consider a range of alternatives to suspensions, including restorative practices.

While educators are willing and ready to embrace alternatives to traditional disciplinary approaches, such as discussions with school staff, loss of privileges, community service, counselling, and restorative practices, we have learned over the past three years that they often do not feel they have the adequate skills, resources, or knowledge to access available services. In both the 2015-2016 and the 2016-2017 school years, restorative practices made up only 7% of all interventions in the TDSB. Approximately 31% of interventions used by TDSB schools were contacting the students’ parent or guardian, followed by a referral to guidance (12-13%), a referral to social work (11%), referrals to an outside agency (7%), and special education services (7%).¹² The intervention framework is in place. Now it is up to schools to put them into practice.

Providing educators and school partners with the tools, resources, and supports needed to tailor interventions to the needs of individual students and the school community are foundational to building a restorative school.

WHAT IS A RESTORATIVE SCHOOL?

“If I have a problem with a teacher, [restorative practices] can help me resolve the problem by setting up a circle with the teacher. We’ll all be in the same room together to speak about what happened.”
-Student, Grade 10,
Central Technical
School

Restorative schools are based on restorative justice principles and philosophies inspired by Indigenous legal traditions that have been practiced for thousands of years. Although there is no universal definition of restorative justice, it is widely understood to be based on ideas about human connectedness. Restorative justice understands conflict as a breakdown of interpersonal relationships.¹³ Thus, restorative justice processes are intended to restore those relationships through equal and meaningful input from all impacted individuals.¹⁴

Unlike western notions of justice that focus on the harm caused by an “offender” to a “victim,” restorative practices encourage us to consider how a given incident may have impacted an entire community and what underlying circumstances need to be addressed to get at the heart of a particular issue. In schools, it is an opportunity for students and teachers to come together as equals and collaboratively determine an appropriate resolution and plan to move forward.

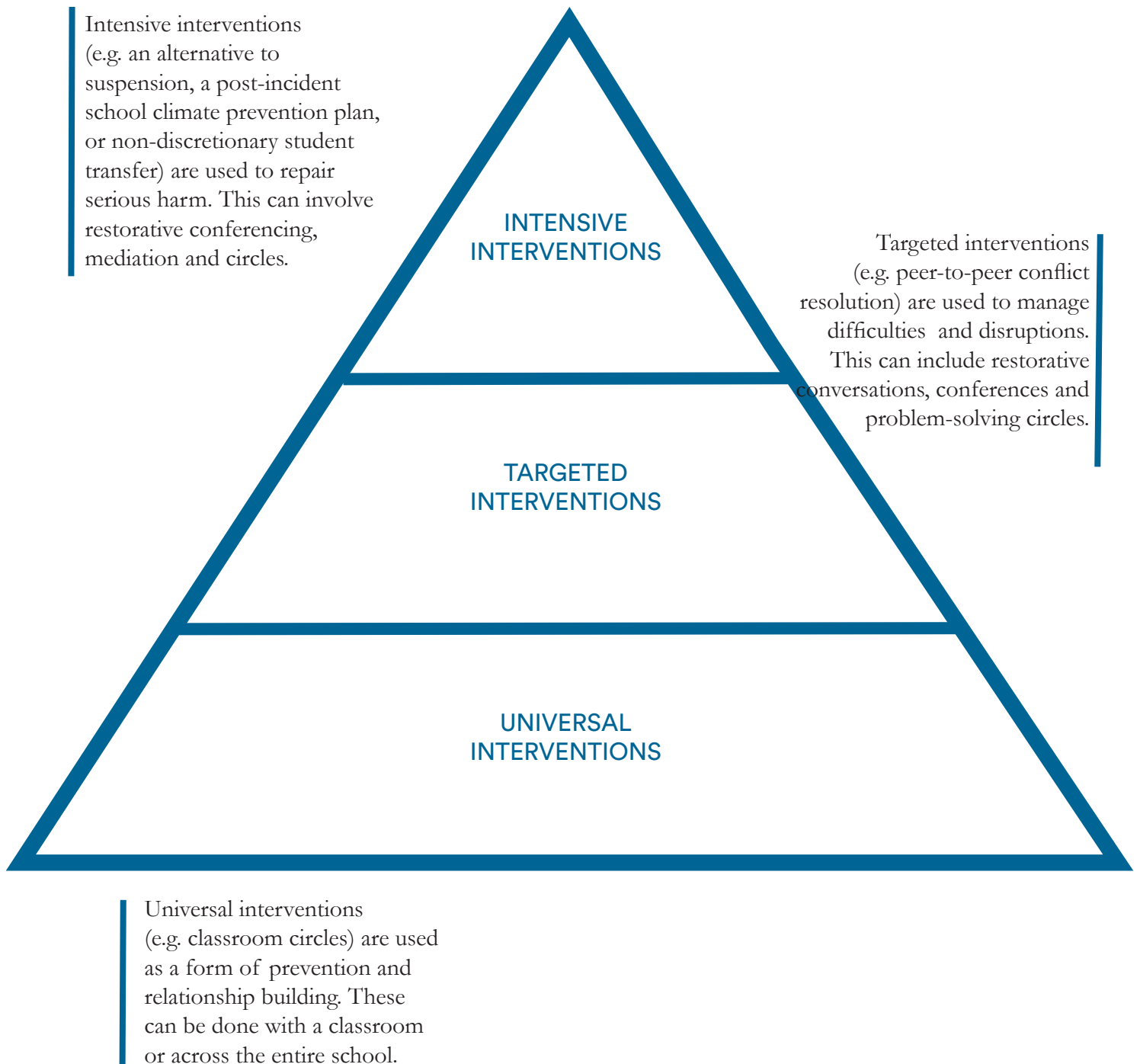
A restorative school believes that problems occurring in the school reflect a greater disconnection in the school community. Studies have shown a correlation between students feeling disconnected from their school and an increase in risky behavior, prolonged school absences, and students placing themselves at risk of hurting themselves or others.¹⁵ Building a culture of connectedness is pivotal to student well-being.

Restorative schools are more than conflict resolution processes. Rather, restorative schools support every individual’s capacity to enter into healthy and equitable interpersonal relationships and strengthen the school community as a whole.

A restorative mindset guides how we build and strengthen relationships, how we establish and instill community norms, and how we ensure equitable and inclusive participation of all community members. A restorative mindset encourages members of the school community to understand the story behind the story. A restorative school integrates a restorative mindset into the daily practice of teaching and learning in the school community. In addition to focusing on repairing relationships, a restorative school also works to prevent problems from occurring, and ensures this is supported by policies and practices. It’s a school where all individuals are valued and see themselves as part of the larger school community.

Restorative Schools Framework

This framework illustrates some of the ways restorative practices can be used in schools.



CASE STUDIES

Eastdale Collegiate Institute and Central Technical School

Eastdale Collegiate Institute and Central Technical School have welcomed us into their communities. Each school provided Peacebuilders with dedicated classrooms to run drop-in services at lunch time and programming throughout the day. Students and staff also use the Peacebuilders' rooms to facilitate restorative practices.

Eastdale Collegiate Institute

Eastdale Collegiate Institute is a secondary school located in Riverdale, Toronto. Serving approximately 120 students from across the city, Eastdale provides a variety of programs and placements, individualized to each student's specific needs and challenges.

In 2014, Peacebuilders embarked on its first full-time school project, in partnership with Eastdale. This partnership provided remarkable experiences, learnings, and opportunities to introduce innovative ways of supporting young people through conflict. Peacebuilders has been fortunate to work with a school so willing to embrace and embed restorative mindset and processes into the fabric of the school, creating an environment where restorative practices are more than a tool; they inform the culture.

Restorative processes are embedded in the school's progressive discipline framework, providing staff and students with concrete alternatives when conflict and misbehaviour arise. Students can participate in a meaningful dialogue when there is a conflict or even when they are having a tough day. We have received referrals for behavioural support, alternative to suspension, and reintegration because Eastdale recognizes that every student deserves an opportunity to learn from their experiences and to develop the capacity to resolve conflict in a healthy way. In 2017-2018, Eastdale had an 80% decrease in suspensions, and the school identified that Peacebuilders directly contributed to this positive change.

There have been many successes throughout our time at Eastdale because of student and staff willingness to embrace new ways of engaging within the school community and emphasizing personal growth and meaningful dialogue during conflict. By using restorative processes within their disciplinary framework, Eastdale prioritizes creating a safe and inclusive space that allows students to work through a variety of issues, such as setting and respecting personal boundaries, the impact of harmful language, how to rebuild trust and respect in friendships, and healthy communication between peers and with staff.

Starting with orientation, the grade 9 cohort is introduced to restorative practices through both community-building and curriculum circles allowing them to become familiar with the process. This experience supports students in meaningful engagement when conflicts arise. Our New Student Circles have provided a space for students new to Eastdale to reflect on their past experiences within the school system and identify both challenges and solutions to make Eastdale a more positive experience for them.

Central Technical School

Central Technical School (C.T.S) is located in the Annex and services approximately 1,100 students. C.T.S. offers a wide range of programs, including all core academic courses, as well as concentration and specialization in visual arts and technical studies. C.T.S. also offers enriched levels and special education, including a resource room and monitoring for students who have been identified as having learning disabilities, and support for students in the transition from high school to university, college, apprenticeship or employment.

In 2017, Peacebuilders expanded its work to C.T.S. Working within a larger school gave us an opportunity to incorporate restorative processes in a school community in new and exciting ways. C.T.S. staff were incredibly open to learning about restorative processes and to inviting Peacebuilders into their classrooms, clubs, and programs. The staff motivation was so incredible that they organized a Restorative Practices Committee to increase their learning and discover new ways to shift the culture at C.T.S.

With so many fantastic programs available at the school, Peacebuilders worked with students and staff in the Reach Ahead summer program for incoming grade 9s, Each One Teach One, and Girls Group in addition to the numerous classes that incorporated circle dialogues into their learning. Furthermore, the amazing art classes at C.T.S. were able to take their experiences with restorative processes and turn them into stunning pieces of art which were displayed at our 2018 Spring For Peace fundraiser.

“Whenever me and my friends had a problem I would go to Peacebuilders and tell them and we would work through the problem through a circle. If I had a problem at home I would go and talk to Peacebuilders about it and they would help me by working with me to create solutions to solve it and look at other supports.”

-Student, Grade 10, Central Technical School



SHIFTING SCHOOL CULTURE

“If you do not deal with the conflict, a person can go home suspended and during that time sit and stew on what happened, making them angrier. The student then returns to school and they are upset and anything the person does can fuel their anger and they end up escalating, another conflict ensues...”

-Student, Grade 10,
Central Technical
School

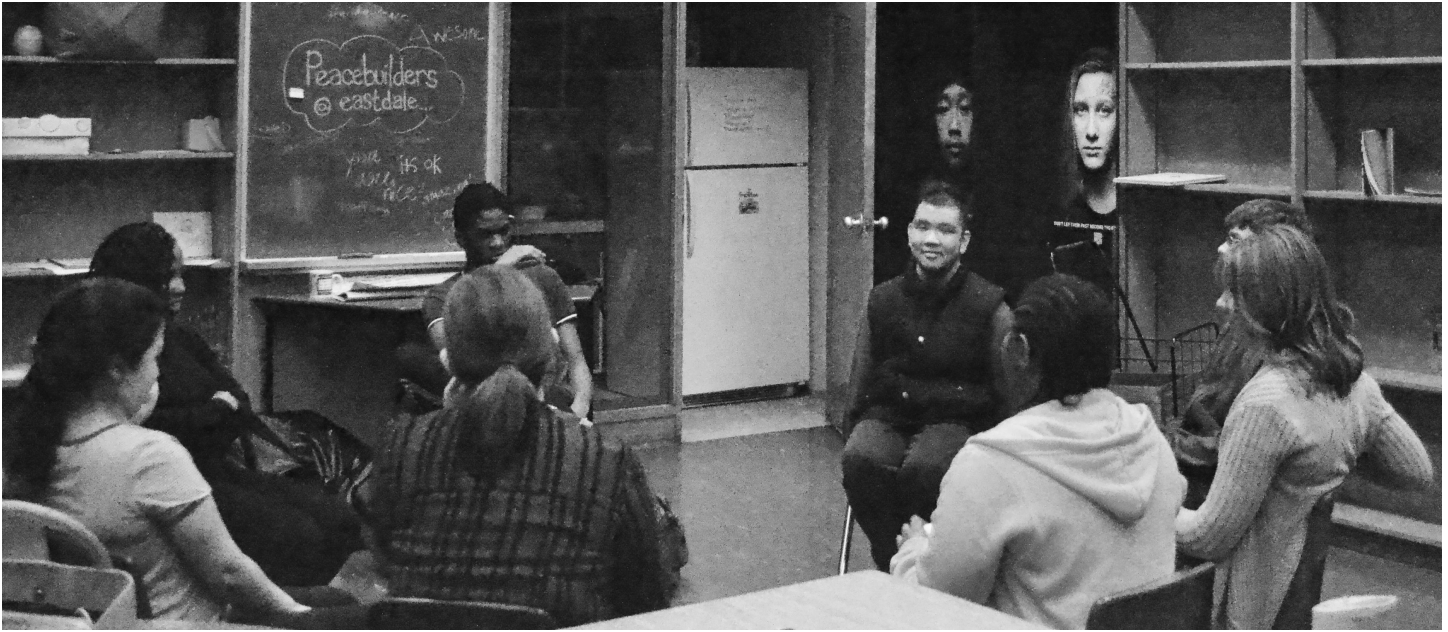
From the outset, this project focused on developing a model that embeds restorative practices in high schools, which could then be shared and adapted to high schools throughout the Toronto District School Board. It became clear early on that the policies needed to embed restorative practices in schools were already in place. Educators, administrators, and police are encouraged to use supportive interventions that promote positive student behaviours, instead of relying on suspensions, expulsions, and criminal charges to respond to school-based conflict.

But replacing a disciplinary culture that removes students from the school with one that aspires to help students become engaged members of the school community is an ongoing process that requires a culture shift.

When an individual enters a school, the culture is reflected in every interaction, including interactions between adults and students and between the adults. The relationships between staff create and contribute to the school culture and can be seen in various cultural cues, including:

- how school administrators speak to the staff team
- how the staff team speaks about school administrators
- the patterns of communication within staff meetings, as well as what is said immediately following the meeting
- how criticisms and disagreements are responded to
- whether and how the school invites, promotes, and supports new initiatives and individual vision
- whether and how the school responds to identified needs amongst staff and students¹⁶





“What pillars of the TDSB can we build on to ‘compel’ adults to show up for restorative processes?”
-Community Partner

To shift the culture of a school, individuals within the school community must change their stance or internal view. The shift in stance changes the way the individual thinks about situations that may arise, which can, in turn, change the individual’s actions. Culture change requires changing individual thinking, and replacing long-held beliefs about the purpose of discipline. And it requires change on a whole-school level.

A whole-school approach includes all aspects of school life, such as the curriculum, school climate, policies, and the implementation of policies. It requires that all levels within the school are involved—the board, school, classes, individuals, families and communities.

Creating a restorative culture shift

In thinking about how to work towards a restorative culture shift, our Advisory Council grouped the issues and challenges into four key areas:

- 1. Redefining the school community**
- 2. Youth voice**
- 3. Restorative supporters and ambassadors**
- 4. Putting policies into practice**

“The [community organization’s] space serves as a community hub...It allows students to connect with people and the community in ways you otherwise wouldn’t.”
-Vice-Principal,
Central Technical
School

Redefining the school community

Both the Ministry of Education and the TDSB progressive discipline policies describe the importance of building and sustaining a positive school climate, in which all members of the school community are included. Without an understanding of where and how one fits in, individuals can become disengaged. It is important that all members of the school community—from students and teachers, to hall monitors, support staff and parents—understand their value as individuals and as part of the broader community. An inclusive community encourages stronger relationships, more open communication, and fosters increased accountability to the self and others.

Throughout the Restorative Schools Early Diversion Pilot Project, ongoing challenges in implementing a restorative culture were reflected in how schools, and the education system more broadly, viewed themselves in relation to the communities in which they are located. In keeping with restorative philosophies of interconnectedness, schools must develop and strengthen relationships throughout the school, as well as beyond the school, to include community organizations and leaders, police, and religious organizations. By opening its doors to increased collaboration, schools can strengthen their ties, increase its impact, and provide further opportunities for young people to thrive.

Issues and Learnings

- Board-wide policies can create barriers to meaningful engagement from community partners.
- Developing a formal partnership with a school board can be a time-consuming process, especially for organizations or leaders with few resources at their disposal.
- Overlapping roles between school staff and community organizations may activate union concerns
- Community partners (such as community organizations, police, community leaders) often work in silos, where all are working for similar outcomes but with minimal communication or collaboration.
- It is challenging for community workers to support young people that are struggling during school hours, even if it would be of benefit to the young person and/or the school.

“Having [a community organization] at the school is really amazing. They don’t talk at you, judge you, or get you in trouble, like other adults in the school. Having someone who’s there to talk...it’s really nice.”

-Student, Grade 9,
Central Technical
School

Youth voice

Throughout the course of the pilot project, Advisory Council members quickly identified a common thread that connects us all: increasing positive outcomes for youth is central to each stakeholder’s mission. To ensure services, supports, and resources are youth-centred, meaningful, and relevant to young people’s needs, it is imperative that youth are involved in every facet of creating the culture shift within a school.

Youth make up the largest demographic of a school community, but they are rarely involved in the decision-making that directly impacts their school experiences. Young people are uniquely qualified to identify the daily challenges that they experience and create solutions that prioritize their success and well-being. Promoting youth voice requires adults to be aware of how adult perspectives are traditionally centered, and demonstrate a willingness to step back and listen. A seat at a table is not enough. Instead, adults must dismantle power dynamics that prevent youth voice from being prioritized in order to provide meaningful platforms for youth engagement and involvement in decision-making. If young people are expected to use their voice, they deserve to know that they will be heard and their ideas acted upon.

Issues and Learnings

- Centering youth voice in a way that is meaningful without tokenizing youth.
- Creating safe spaces where youth feel valued for sharing, and adults value their input
- Ensuring that the youth at the table are the ones that would be most impacted by cultural shifts within individual schools and the greater school community.
- Maintaining long-term engagement from youth in a way that appropriately honours and respects their time and energy.
- Prioritize relationship building between youth and staff and provide meaningful opportunities for dialogue.
- Shift away from programming ‘for’ youth to working with youth.

“I am a believer in restorative practices because I feel that they are a far more beneficial alternative to how we currently consequence students with progressive discipline. In my experience, these practices create opportunities for more productive outcomes and decrease both escalation and repeat behaviour with our most under-served students.”

-Teacher, Central Technical School

Restorative supporters and ambassadors

Change must begin with the adults in a school community. As professionals and role models to the students, we must be held accountable for our own practices. We must use the language and model the behaviours we expect to see in our students. For change initiatives to be successful, those leading the change must provide space for those expected to change to be actively involved within the process.¹⁷ It is not enough for the leaders of a school to announce a change and consider it sufficient;¹⁸ schools need changemakers—or restorative supporters and ambassadors—at all levels within the school community to champion the shift. Enhancing each individual’s knowledge and understanding provides space for true supporters to take part in leading the shift.

Having a dependable network of restorative supporters and ambassadors provides the school community with the opportunity to ensure that those leading the change are not just hierarchical leaders, but also encourages active participation from those with social capital. Providing opportunities for adults to learn, ask questions, and implement different strategies will support in cultivating these supporters and ambassadors, and aid in planting seeds across the larger school community.

While most adults in youth-serving professions do it because they genuinely want to increase positive outcomes in young people, there is almost certainly intrinsic motivation associated with their chosen fields. Cultivating a legacy, or knowing that you are leaving the world a better place than you found it, can be an intrinsic motivator that can be harnessed with staff supporters, to aid them in becoming restorative ambassadors, and leaders of a large culture shift.

Issues and Learnings

- Spend time at the beginning of the proposed innovation to establish a common language and shared vision.
- Invite all members of the school community to take part. Individuals with social capital have the unique ability to increase engagement from stakeholders that can be harder to reach.
- Concerns from within the school community must be surfaced and acknowledged. There must be space for ongoing learning and growth for all stakeholders.
- Develop action plans with measurable and concrete outcomes.
- Celebrate milestones and encourage ongoing check-ins. Evaluate progress on milestones and make modifications to the actions plans as needed to continue forward momentum.

“Restorative ambassadors are the ones acting on their agency.”
-Student, Grade 12,
John Polanyi
Collegiate Institute

Putting policy into practice

Every school board is governed by policies that guide how administrators and staff respond to incidents at their school. Policies are written broadly to allow space for staff to exercise agency through informed decision-making within the parameters of the policy and individual school culture. Throughout the pilot project, multiple stakeholders explained that schools often interpret the application of policies very differently. Some schools view the policies as restrictive and, as a result, do not explore the wide range of possible responses to a given incident. Others recognize that a number of possible actions can be taken within the parameters of the policy.

In order for adults to act on their agency, it is critical that they have a strong understanding of the parameters in which they have influence. Content knowledge, understanding of how it relates to one’s role, and a network of others working towards the same shift can better support individuals in informed decision-making.

Throughout the project, we trained interested school staff in restorative practices. We heard repeatedly that many staff feel uncertain about whether they are allowed to lead restorative processes as part of their role within the school. Many were also concerned that they would face obstacles. In addition to training and capacity-building, staff identified that they need a leader that will “go to bat” for them.

Individuals need to feel safe and supported when they are taking informed risks. Adults are more willing to be innovative when they know that they have the support of their supervisor. If they do not feel the trust and support of their supervisor, they are likely to leave decision-making to someone else when an incident in the school arises.

Issues and Learnings

- Providing opportunities for shared learnings and questions is important for all members involved in the proposed culture change. Even when individuals believe that the change is needed, it can be daunting if they are unsure of their skills or the resources available to implement the change.
- “Restorative leaders should require high demandingness (holds individuals accountable), while also providing supportiveness in teaching and learning.”¹⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop strong partnerships between schools and community organizations

While many young people are connected to individuals and organizations within a community, these connections are often disconnected from the school. Building and strengthening partnerships between schools and community organizations can support greater student success by providing increased services and resources, as well as provide for further understanding as to what is occurring for the young person both inside and outside the school building.

School boards must re-examine existing policies to remove barriers in establishing working relationships between schools and organizations. For example, policies relating to confidentiality are critical to protecting young people but can, at times, create constraints when a young person would like to maintain their privacy when they access services during school hours.

Schools and communities can bridge gaps through the creation of partnership spaces, which will support in building trust and greater understanding of the role of each stakeholder, as well as support inter-agency collaboration. Community organizations can use these partnership spaces to gain a greater understanding of the policies and procedures of schools and the school board, to better understand areas where additional supports can be offered, as well as understanding of where limitations may be.

Community organizations can support greater collaboration by creating and sharing community asset maps that identify resources and services available to young people, as well as how to access services. Having a presence at school events, such as Parent/Teacher Night and assemblies, can support in increasing awareness of the services offered.

Use data to identify needs and service gaps for young people

Data can be used to identify gaps in services, professional development opportunities for staff, and areas of risk for young people, and to increase understanding of young peoples' needs. This data can also serve as a guide in understanding what grants or other funding opportunities there may be to help fill identified needs.

School boards should make school-specific data from surveys available to students, parents/guardians, and community organizations to increase transparency, create opportunities for collaboration, and strengthen community ties.

Schools should use data from student and parent surveys, statistics, and demographic information to help informed decision-making.

Community organizations should use school data and surveys to inform programming opportunities within their own organizations and to create partnership opportunities with schools.

Training and capacity-building

Embedding opportunities for training and capacity-building will ensure school communities are working from a shared understanding of restorative practices, building networks of learning and support, and engaging in ongoing learning and reflection.

School boards should ensure that all school staff, as well as community partners, are provided with training on both the Ministry of Education's and school-board specific policies and procedures. These trainings should be mandatory and offered not only for new staff, but also as a refresher course as part of the boards' ongoing learning and professional development requirements.

Schools should provide further training and capacity-building for staff to better understand how the policies relate to their individual roles. This will support individuals to understand the agency they have within their own roles, as well as increase individual accountability to the policies when responding to incidents as they arise in schools. For example, having a clear understanding of progressive discipline will help the staff person effectively respond to an incident, as well as increase their ability to ensure appropriate supports are in place for the student and family.

Community organizations should provide training in restorative practices, crisis de-escalation, and conflict resolution to school administrators, staff, students, and other community members, to increase the capacity for individuals to work through conflict.

Restorative leadership teams in schools

Providing school-wide training and capacity-building opportunities helps to plant the seed, but in order to cultivate real change there needs to be ongoing engagement, learning, and resources available directly within the school.

School boards should support individual schools in using data and professional development to support the school community in identifying strengths of the school culture, as well as ongoing challenges and needs. Feedback from all school community individuals should be solicited and be available to provide their responses anonymously. The feedback should be generated into a summary report, specific to individual schools, and the summary shared in a way that invites reflection and opportunities for positive change.

Schools should invite and encourage all interested individuals (including school staff, students, parents/guardians, and community partners) to take part in forming a restorative leadership team in the school. Using the data provided through the feedback report, the desired change should be articulated and circulated for additional feedback. The restorative leadership team will lead the proposed changes, while ensuring ongoing engagement of the school community and greater community. The leadership team should develop a common language, a vision for the proposed change, an action plan with concrete milestones, and ensure that successes large and small are recognized and celebrated.

Mentorship and champions

Every individual, whether young person or adult, needs to be supported. This is a significant need when the expectation is to change long-held mindsets and behaviours. School leaders, whether leaders in positions of authority or those leaders with social capital, are in positions to provide mentorship to their colleagues, as well as champion the change processes being suggested and strived towards.

School boards and schools should ensure that their leaders, such as Superintendents and Principals, empower their teams in decision-making and risk-taking, within the parameters delineated in board policies and procedures. In addition to leadership support, the school board and individual schools should create opportunities for practicing new skills in a setting that encourages informed risk-taking, and offers constructive feedback as part of personal and professional growth.

Centre and embed youth voice

Young people are the heart of our schools, but are often left out of conversations and decision-making designed to improve outcomes for students.

School boards should ensure that student voice and engagement initiatives are supported by board-wide policies and expectations, which hold schools accountable in creating and maintaining these avenues for youth input. The board should also create forums for ongoing, open engagement in policy creation and review, as well as strategic planning for board-wide strategies, with youth voice at the forefront.

Schools should provide meaningful and ongoing opportunities for youth to provide input on all facets of school life. Spaces and avenues created should be reflective of the school population and demographics, and young peoples' time and energy should be respected and honoured through appropriate compensation that meets the needs of the individual students. For example, some students may require volunteer hours, while others may require monetary compensation for their time.

Community organizations should ensure youth voice is embedded in policies, as well as strategic planning, through engaging young people in leadership positions (such as developing a Youth Advisory, having youth roles on the Board of Directors, etc.).

Embed restorative framework and interventions

Having restorative interventions and processes embedded within schools' progressive discipline framework – with a clear understanding of implementation processes – ensures that there is a higher degree of demand and accountability on the part of school staff to use restorative processes when engaging with problem behaviours.

School boards should more clearly articulate what restorative processes may –and may not- entail, to ensure that these processes are voluntary, maintain confidentiality, and meet the needs of the student. School boards should create a protocol that provides opportunities for safe and confidential student access to external agencies. This will support young people in accessing services, while also ensuring that community partners understand and are committed to school board policies, such as the duty to report protocol specific to TDSB, or reporting potential safety risks to school administrators when referrals occur at school.

Schools should embed a restorative framework into their school culture as a means not only of responding to problem behaviours, but also as prevention and relationship-building tools. This will support all staff in consistently working towards a more harmonized and safe school environment, while also providing tangible ways of using restorative processes that are responsive and accessible. For example, a transitions team that includes relevant community partners and school staff can support a young person transitioning to the school (whether returning from suspension, or through a non-discretionary student transfer). Having a framework in place also helps to remove potential barriers, such as questions around confidentiality or liability, as all expectations are clearly defined at the outset.

Develop networks for learning and sharing

Building a network of restorative schools will increase awareness of the positive work occurring in schools, and provide interested schools with mentorship and expertise from their colleagues and peers.

School boards should support the development of a network of restorative schools by connecting individual schools, sharing information board-wide to increase awareness and celebrate success stories, and providing professional development days dedicated to restorative practices, led by individuals from the restorative schools.

Schools that have experienced success in creating a culture shift should share staff time, stories, challenges, and data to support shared learning opportunities.

Community organizations should engage with schools that have been successful in creating a culture shift to learn more about how the school operates – including the expectations of staff and students – to increase its understanding of the expectations of school partnerships, and how community partners may support in responding to incidents involving the school.



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“I picked this design to try and accommodate everyone in one drawing. Every religion, faith, and every diversity so no one would feel left out. They are circling the peace sign as to keep it together, basically they need each other to keep the balance. I put the traditional medicine wheel to represent the native population since we are on their land. The pride flag is the peace sign to show allyship to the LGBTQ+ community.

Peacebuilders to me means safe. I say this because whenever I want to vent about something or need advice on a situation or help with anything I can come to Peacebuilders and they will help. Peacebuilders has helped me emotionally and physically through many hard times and I have seen them help other students who are dealing with things too. If it wasn't for Peacebuilders on a real note I really would have dropped out of school just to try and figure out my life so I am grateful and really appreciate what Peacebuilders has done.” - Talaya, Central Technical School



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