

Applying Restorative Justice Practices to Minneapolis Public School Students Recommended for Possible Expulsion: A Pilot Program Evaluation of the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program

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Discipline and youth development

Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) is committed to improving the educational experience and academic outcomes of students. Their challenges mirror national concerns: dropout rates and disproportionate minority contact in suspensions and expulsions – while decreasing – remain significant obstacles to success.

In exploring solutions, MPS addresses the developmental needs of students using alternative disciplinary processes, one of which is the Family and Youth Restorative Conference program.

MPS Discipline Statistics

- 60,398 disciplinary incidents (2008-9)
- Majority of offenders are males in grades 8-10
- Disorderly conduct/insubordination account for 36% of incidents
- Out of school suspension is the result in 87% of cases

Program Evaluation

Minneapolis Public Schools and the Legal Rights Center collaborated with the University of Minnesota's Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center to evaluate the RCP Program.

Evaluation Design	Methods
Process evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant satisfaction & awareness Outcome Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- to post-survey for students and parents Referral year to 1 year later (school records data) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection via self administered surveys; \$10 gift card Response rate at follow up: 59% students; 71% parents Data Analysis: descriptive statistics; paired t-tests

Sample

Students (N=49)	Parent/Guardians (N = 49)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 63% Male 14.7 years old 57% African-American, 16% Native American Incidents most frequently resulting in referral: Assault (55%); Weapons (22%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 96% Female 61% age 30-39 49% African-American 73% have family income below 125% of Federal Poverty level

The Family & Youth Restorative Conference Program (RCP)

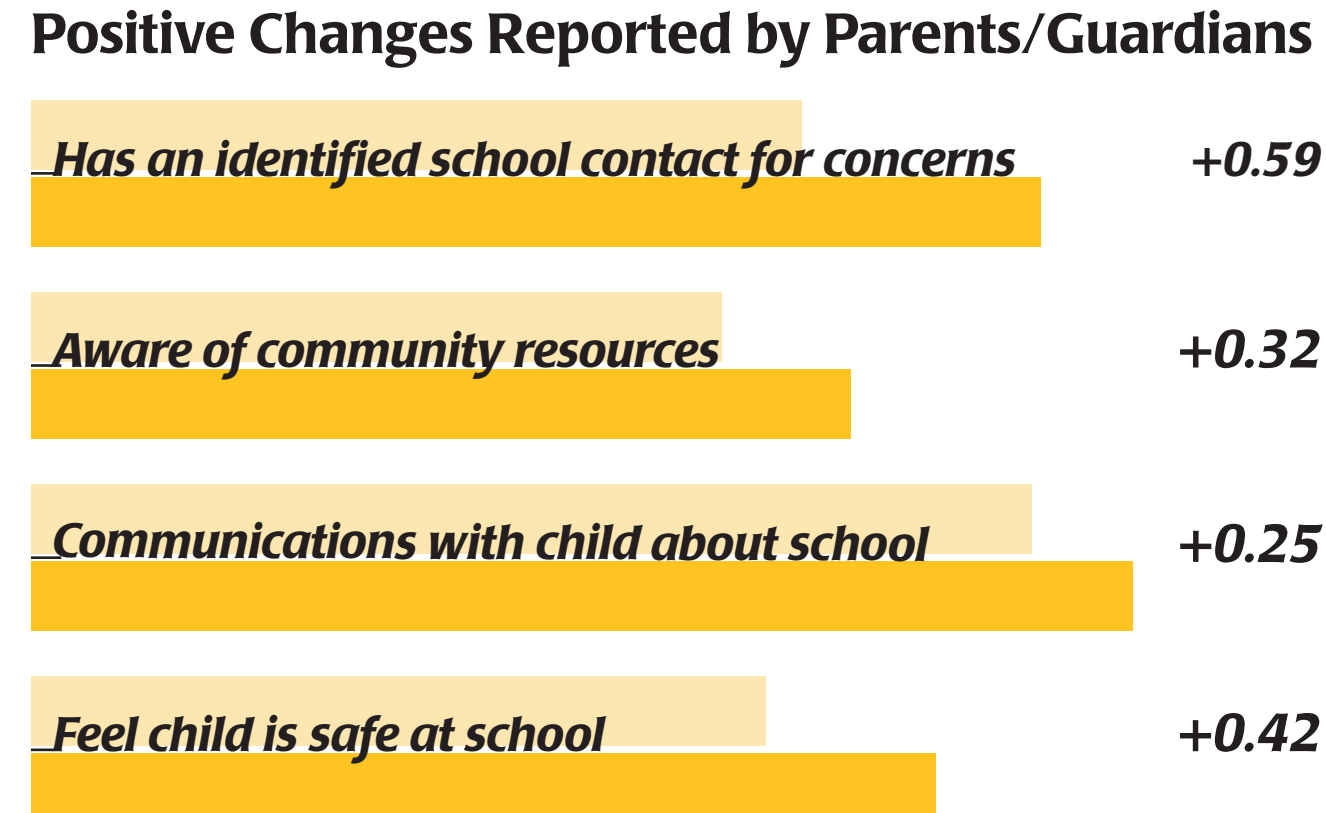
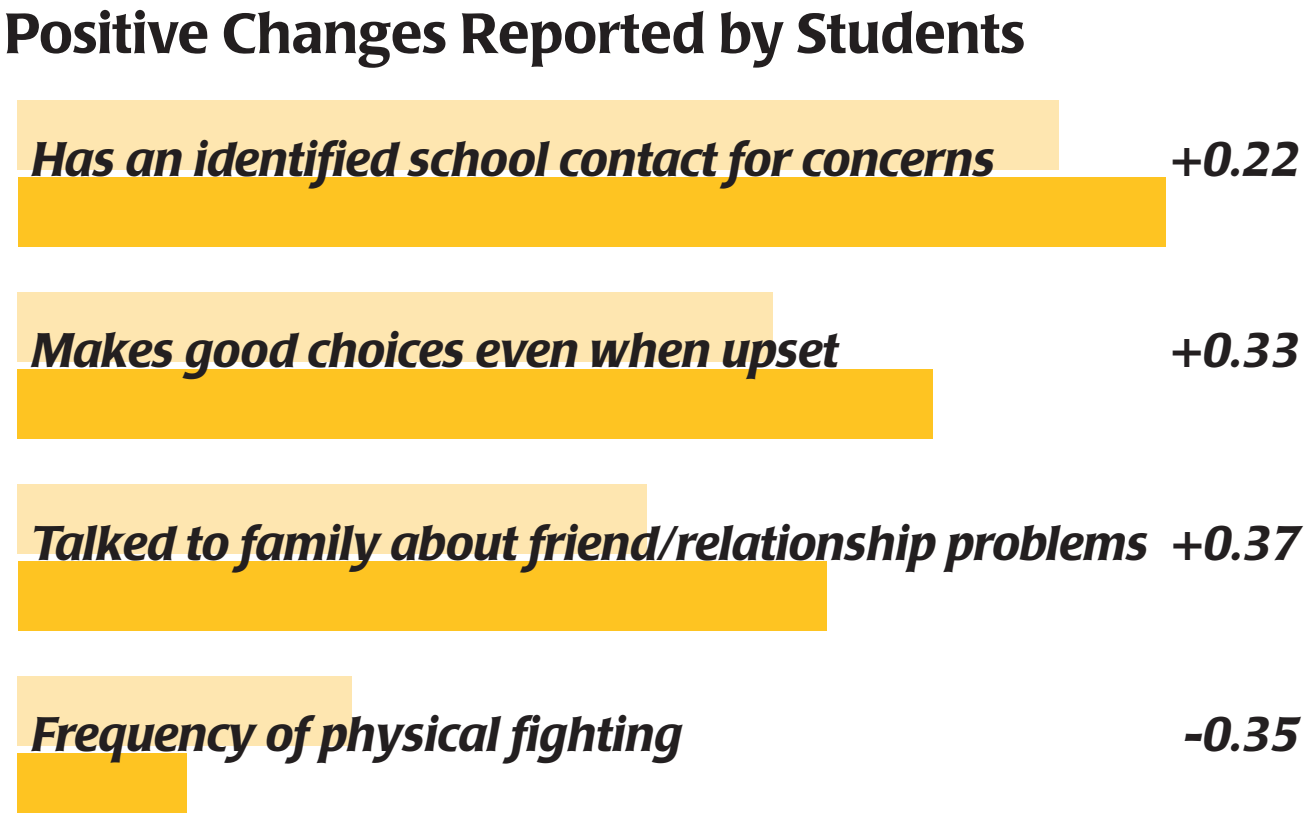
- ### Overview
- Offered since 2008
 - Implemented in partnership with the Legal Rights Center – a community-based, non profit law firm.
 - Students referred to program after receiving recommendation for expulsion from school administration due to behavioral incidents.
 - Provisional transfer of student to a new or alternative educational setting.
 - Leverages a restorative justice/youth development approach.



Zero Tolerance vs. Restorative Justice

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension/expulsion prevents access to services to improve school performance and address behavior Ignores causal factors Does not act as a deterrent; since implementation, violent incidences have not decreased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds student accountable while acknowledging circumstances Addresses negative behavior and causes Offers administrators flexibility Empowers families, staff and offenders
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Results



Mean responses on a 4-point scale
 Pre Conference Survey | Post Conference Survey

Key Program Components

Restorative Family Conference	Accountability Plan
Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Family or guardians District social worker School representatives Important others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created by RCP participants Addresses placement at new school Establishes performance targets for restoring good standing at original school Referrals to therapeutic or social services
Conference Agenda <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify family and student strengths Discuss incident and school/ home issues Reflect on accountability Identify support needed 	

Discussion/Recommendations

Preliminary analyses indicate:

- Students report making better decisions and avoiding expulsion proceedings;
- Significant reductions in number of suspensions during referral year vs. one year later; and
- Improvements in communication and school connections for both students and parents.

Recommendations include:

- Collecting longitudinal data on educational outcomes: attendance, classes passed, graduation;
- Extending reach of program to more schools and less severe behavioral incidents; and
- Promoting alternatives to zero-tolerance policies that prevent school dropout and keep students engaged and progressing toward educational/vocational goals.

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