

# CULTURE SHIFT

*Moving From Exclusion to  
Relational Discipline Policies*

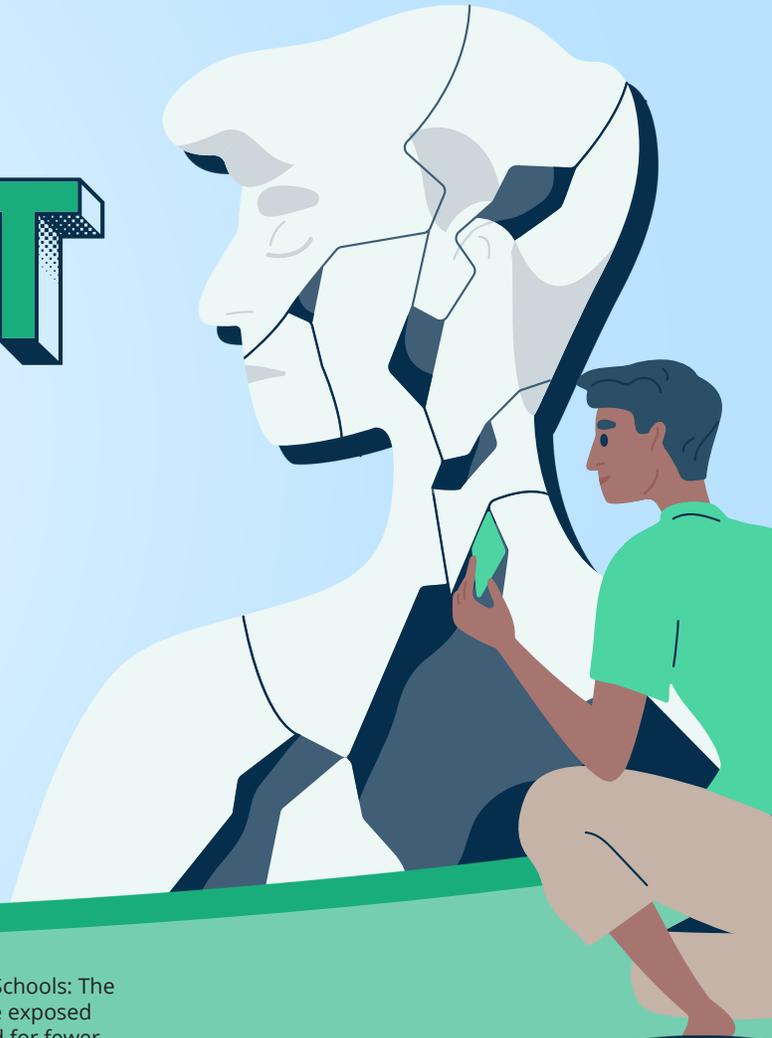
**F**or centuries, schools have relied on exclusionary discipline approaches to deter and limit misbehavior in schools. But research from the fields of psychology, sociology, and economics consistently indicates that when students are excluded, it increases incidences of misbehavior, detachment, mental health challenges, dropout rates, and juvenile and adult incarceration. Conversely, increasing access to restorative practices results in better student outcomes across all areas.

A Learning Policy Institute (LPI) report, “Fostering Belonging, Transforming Schools: The Impact of Restorative Practices,” says students of all backgrounds who were exposed to the expanded use of restorative practices were suspended less often and for fewer days—and showed improvements on standardized tests in English and math. Schools that increased their use of restorative practices saw marked improvements in student behavior and school climate, too.

The LPI report recommends these steps to increase exposure to restorative practices in your school:

- Shifting from a culture of exclusion to a relational culture;
- Developing staff mastery;
- Ensuring that students of all backgrounds gain access to restorative practices; and
- Empowering sustained implementation.

Use this *Leading Lessons* guide with your school staff to reflect on the discipline practices in your school and how—together—you can take steps to be more intentional about implementing restorative practices.





## Ensuring that Students of All Backgrounds Gain Access to Restorative Practices

Once you've identified your restorative practices, it's important to look at data—a key component in ensuring that your practices are both effective and equitable. A data-driven approach will require multiple sources of data to identify both shortfalls and efficacy and provide a pathway for improvement.

Exclusionary discipline is often applied unevenly. For example, Black students are more likely to be excluded than their white peers for similar behaviors—exacerbating equity issues and making it harder for schools to serve the educational needs of all students.

### Reflection Questions

A report, "Using School Discipline Data to Pinpoint Concerns and Track Progress," emphasizes putting the right questions in the mix to finetune your school's processes and practices and ensure they're equitable.

Restorative practices address root causes of student misbehavior while reducing exclusionary approaches, but they have the potential to improve racial disparities while enhancing school climates, academic engagement, and academic performance.

1. How do we measure the effect of restorative practices in our school?
2. Do disproportionate or inequitable discipline practices exist? If so, which student demographics are most affected, and why do you think this is?
3. What schoolwide interventions could prevent discipline situations? Examples might include reteaching expectations or routines, increasing supervision in certain locations or events, or changing schedules.

## Empowering Sustained Implementation

As with any change, it doesn't happen overnight. Growing pains exist when implementing or tweaking any established process in schools—and it takes time to accrue the benefits of a restorative community.

Principals and their teachers and staff hoping to realize the positive impacts of restorative practices can structure implementation to be sustained for multiple years to "ride out" the growing pains of the shift to a new culture and approach to discipline.

**Key Consideration:** In some studies of restorative implementation, trend lines in outcomes (such as academic performance) over time are U-shaped, meaning there are short-term declines followed by long-term gains.

### Reflection Questions

Despite growing pains, you can make a strategic effort to stay focused on your goals related to restorative practices.

1. What short-term strategies can we implement?
2. What strategies are more long-term in nature?
3. What data confirm whether we are making progress toward our school discipline goals?
4. How can we know whether we're achieving positive outcomes?

When restorative practices are supported by a cultural shift that makes PD more than theoretical, student performance and equity see marked improvements alongside decreases in exclusionary discipline. Let's all strive to put such practices in place for the benefit of all children.

## NOTES

