

Building Safe, Supportive and Restorative School Communities in New York City

Case Study Series Vol. III

Fall 2015

This case study is the third in a series about the work New Yorkers are doing to create positive, safe, and inclusive schools that respect the dignity of all school community members.

By giving us a glimpse of what they have started, students, educators, and parents in these schools, along with community-based partners, are calling on the Department of Education in New York City to sustain their work by investing in Restorative Justice approaches and supporting more schools that want to begin the transformation from punitive to restorative climates.



Students at M.S. 22 in the Bronx discuss their action plan for improving school culture and climate.

Rooted in the needs and values of individual schools, Restorative Justice (RJ) approaches look different at every school, but for many, **RJ involves processes and structures for building community, repairing relationships when conflict happens, and supporting everyone to be accountable to one another.** For many schools, implementing RJ involves a cultural shift that can include a variety of formal and informal practices for community building, conflict resolution, and de-escalation, such as circles, mediations, formal restorative conferences, mentoring, and leadership development that can be led by any member of a school community.

For schools growing Restorative Justice, the stakes are high. During the 2013-2014 school year, NYC schools reported more than 53,000 suspensions, down 30% from the 2011-2012 school year. But key disparities have remained the same: **Black students, less than one third of the student population, were given more than half of the suspensions citywide,** and students with disabilities, 12% of the student body, were given 30% of the suspensions. The schools and organizations featured in this case study are committed to ending these disparities as well as the pushout and criminalization of students of color.

Improving School Climate at Four New York City Public Schools

The following schools across New York City are profiled in this case study:

- The Bushwick Campus (consists of 4 schools)
- Jordan L. Mott Middle School 22
- The James Baldwin School: A NYC Outward Bound School
- Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School

The models for transforming school climate at these schools include:
⇒ multi-stakeholder decision-making processes
⇒ tackling conversations about race and racism
⇒ creating core values upon which school community is based

These initiatives are supported by the Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York, Make the Road New York, the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI), the New Settlement Parent Action Committee, and Teachers Unite.

The James Baldwin School: Commitment to School as Community

The James Baldwin School: A NYC Outward Bound School (JBS) is a small transfer high school located within the Bayard Rustin Educational Complex in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. The NYC Department of Education defines transfer schools as “small, academically rigorous high schools designed to re-engage and support students who have dropped out or who have fallen behind and now have fewer credits than they should for their age and grade.”

One of nearly fifty such schools across the city, JBS was founded in 2005 on **seven essential core values** that guide relationships within the school community. Last year, JBS decided to hire a staff person with the job of leading and developing the school’s restorative culture to help uphold the school’s core values. In order to prioritize this role within limited resources, the staff agreed to reallocate what they had in their budget for substitute teachers and instead cover each other in the event of staff absences.

Pushing Back Against Pushout

The school decided to invest in this restorative approach in order to combat disparities amongst those most impacted by exclusionary measures of school discipline. The JBS student population - 91% Black and Latino - is largely representative of the students most negatively impacted by punitive school discipline policies. Tyler Brewster, JBS Restorative Coordinator and Teachers Unite member, explains, **“We are charged with the responsibility of ensuring we create an environment in which students can thrive and we do not repeat emotional and academic harms previously committed in their school career.”**

A large percentage of students transferring to JBS do so as a result of direct and indirect school pushout tactics such as high-stakes testing, excessively punitive disciplinary measures, and exclusionary school environments. At JBS, an added effort is made to develop and strengthen the bonds within the school community. As a transfer school, the student population fluctuates a great deal: students can be enrolled for a full three years or only for a semester. This presents additional challenges to establishing strong connections among community members, as compared to a traditional high school setting. To address this challenge, JBS maintains a strong Crew Advisory culture and encourages student voice.



Students sit in circle with their advisor in Crew, JBS’s version of advisory, a time set aside in many NYC schools when students check in with a teacher and build relationships.

school climate, and is responsible for collecting and analyzing data related to school-wide discipline and making recommendations.

The James Baldwin School Core Values

The school’s curriculum and teaching, culture and ceremonies, rules, regulations, and habits of interaction – inside the classroom and out – are based on the following Core Values:

Respect for Humanity
Respect for Diversity
Respect for the Intellect
Respect for the Truth
Commitment to Peace
Commitment to Justice
Commitment to Democracy

Building a Restorative Justice Action Team (RJAT)

A strategy developed by Teachers Unite members, a Restorative Justice Action Team (RJAT) is a **diverse collaborative of school-based community stakeholders** that seeks to engage the whole school community in growing Restorative Justice. JBS’s RJAT is focused on initiatives to promote a positive

At the start of the school year, JBS's RJAT convenes to develop two goals that will improve school climate and can be included in the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP), which acts as the effective blueprint for the principal's budget development. The CEP is written by the JBS School Leadership Team (SLT), a team required in every public school by state education law. The SLT identifies priorities for their school and is made up of parents, teachers, and students (in high schools). The RJAT meets twice each month throughout the school year to develop programs related to the execution of CEP goals, and to create and facilitate Restorative Justice initiatives. This **multi-stakeholder approach** ensures that the perspective of each stakeholder group is represented.

While many restorative structures have been built in the school, JBS is introducing more restorative practices in the 2015-2016 school year:

- **Restorative Justice Elective:** This one-credit class will be an introduction to Restorative Justice practices for students. End-of-term projects and surveys will provide guidance for future restorative practices at JBS. The class will also grow the number of student leaders who can coach other schools exploring Restorative Justice.
- **Department Workshop:** This professional development workshop for school staff will be open to one person from each core academic department. Teachers will learn tools to include community-building circles in academic classes, which will help to emphasize the proactive effects of school-based restorative justice.
- **School Leadership Team (SLT) Parent Workshop:** This introductory workshop for families and school staff will provide an overview of the restorative practices in place at JBS. Using a circle process, participants will identify opportunities for parents to be involved in the school. The goal is to develop a new pool of stakeholders who are familiar with the philosophy of Restorative Justice.
- **Student Enrichment Day:** A weekend student conference with skill-building workshops that focus on conflict resolution, restorative practices and social-emotional awareness. Students will be equipped to facilitate mediations and alternative responses to school-based conflict.
- **Teacher Inquiry Group:** A series of lunch-and-learn conversations about school climate and culture, Restorative Justice, as well as **privilege, power and oppression**. This group will provide a safe space for educators to reflect upon and discuss issues that matter to them and the school.

"A positive and supportive school culture is essential for healthy youth development," says Tyler. "Conflict and tension are an unavoidable component of human interaction. Schools need to be properly resourced to provide positive outlets for intervention. School-based restorative justice models are an excellent vehicle for significant shifts in school culture. **Successful implementation requires deliberate interconnection of adequate funding sources, appropriate staffing, resources for educational opportunities, and genuine community willingness for reflection and relationship building.**"

Menu of Restorative Responses at the James Baldwin School

Fairness Committee: Led by students and staff, this committee uses a restorative discussion process to respond to violations of the school's core values rather than focusing on rules being broken. The process seeks to create, through dialogue and consensus, appropriate *consequences* for those violations, rather than mete out prescribed punishments.

Peer Mediation: Trained in conflict resolution skills, student mediators lead problem solving conferences.

Community Re-Entry Conferences [CRC]: Designed to address classroom conflict between staff and students, CRCs are facilitated so that teachers and students are able to discuss the root causes of a conflict, empathically connect to one another's perspectives, and collaborate on a path to resolution.

Multi-stakeholder Strategies to Improving School Climate at Jordan L. Mott Middle School 22



Parents, teachers, and community members discuss action plans for improving school climate.

The Jordan L. Mott Middle School 22 (M.S. 22) is located in the Concourse Village section of the South Bronx. A number of pivotal transitions occurred at M.S. 22 over the past few years with respect to safety and discipline procedures, influenced by changes in administration and the addition of a charter school co-location. In the 2011-2012 school year, M.S. 22 gave out 204 suspensions. **In just two years, the school cut their suspension figures by more than half.**

It was within this context of transition and shifting perspectives on school discipline that M.S. 22 partnered with a local parent

organizing group, the New Settlement Parent Action Committee (PAC). The aim of this collaboration during the 2014-2015 school year was to embark on a comprehensive needs assessment of key school stakeholders, followed by focus groups and a culminating multi-stakeholder school climate roundtable, ultimately yielding the development of a **community action plan to improve school climate.**

PAC is a parent-led organization fighting for quality education in School District 9 in the South Bronx and across New York City. Many PAC leaders have historically been connected to M.S. 22 through their children. PAC was deeply invested in partnering with the school to bring the voices of different stakeholders together for collective visioning and action. In supporting this district middle school exploring positive disciplinary alternatives, PAC was interested in using its strategies to build greater understanding of and buy-in for these disciplinary alternatives from parents, students, staff, and School Safety Agents. As PAC leader Michelle Reyes explains:

You're a genuine stakeholder when you're putting your life, your heart, and your effort into improving the experiences of community members. The object of pulling together a school climate roundtable is to get everyone on the same page and build equity, without titles getting in the way, so that action can be taken with input from all the perspectives that make up the school community.

Step 1: Needs Assessment

The needs assessment of community stakeholders at M.S. 22 was designed by Dr. Christopher Branson (then Director of Juvenile Justice Programs at Mount Sinai Hospital) and PAC parent leaders. It was subsequently revised and approved for use by M.S. 22 staff. Through the assessment, M.S. 22 students, parents, staff, and School Safety Agents (SSAs) were surveyed, with a subset of questions tailored specifically to each demographic. While the New York City Department of Education does release an annual Learning Environment Survey, it does not gather responses from SSAs. Furthermore, the M.S. 22 survey created questions for students, parents, and staff that differed markedly from the DOE survey. Survey takers were asked to evaluate to what extent their school employed a restorative or punitive approach to school discipline, share their opinion on consistency in enforcement of school discipline, and indicate the quality of their relationships with different segments of the school population. A total of 236 needs assessments were collected from students, parents, staff, and SSAs.

Some Questions from the Needs Assessments

- In M.S. 22, do students get to talk about important social topics that affect their lives?
- In M.S. 22, do parents have the opportunity to be involved with school safety and discipline?
- As a School Safety Agent, do you feel like members of the school community have a clear understanding of your role and when they should call upon your services?

Key strategies that supported strong survey collection involved prioritizing language access by having surveys available in English and Spanish, compensating for variations in literacy through oral interviews, ensuring confidentiality by making surveys anonymous, and making use of lunch periods, parent-teacher conferences, and staff meetings to collect surveys. Easy to read one-page summaries of each stakeholder group's responses were created for the school community. School counselor Whitney Ford reflected on the process:

This is data we need because we know we're making progress – we know we've been doing so much better with suspensions. On the flip side, so many kids don't want to report things to adults, and we still need to push more on bullying. Data like this gives us a sense of where to concentrate our efforts.

Step 2: Focus Groups

Once surveys were collected, separate focus groups were set up with each stakeholder group (students, parents, staff, and SSAs) to share perceptions of school discipline and climate, discuss preliminary survey results, and most importantly, develop key action items that would be discussed at a school climate roundtable with all school stakeholders. The process of holding focus groups neatly coincided with the formation of the Student Council, a newly developed body of student representatives from each classroom elected by their peers that became deeply invested in the process.

Students had a thoughtful and lively discussion and debate on school discipline issues. Key survey findings on teasing and bullying energized the group and spurred them to action. The Student Council decided to facilitate the school climate roundtable and to share out their solutions-oriented proposal to pilot a peer mentorship program.

Step 3: School Climate Roundtable

The School Climate Roundtable was held at the close of the school year to bring together all stakeholders, reflect on what had been learned about the community at large, and to propose changes for the coming school year in which each stakeholder group would take leadership in some capacity. The roundtable began with student facilitators guiding an opening circle. Participants identified their role in the school community and shared their thoughts on practices that made them feel safe at M.S. 22. Everyone then split up into their respective stakeholder groups and wrote up their hopes for and expectations of the other stakeholder groups. Each group then reviewed the expectations others had of them. They were asked to formulate action steps from the vantage point of their own group that they felt prepared to take on for the coming school year.



The School Climate Roundtable at M.S. 22 shares the findings from the focus groups.

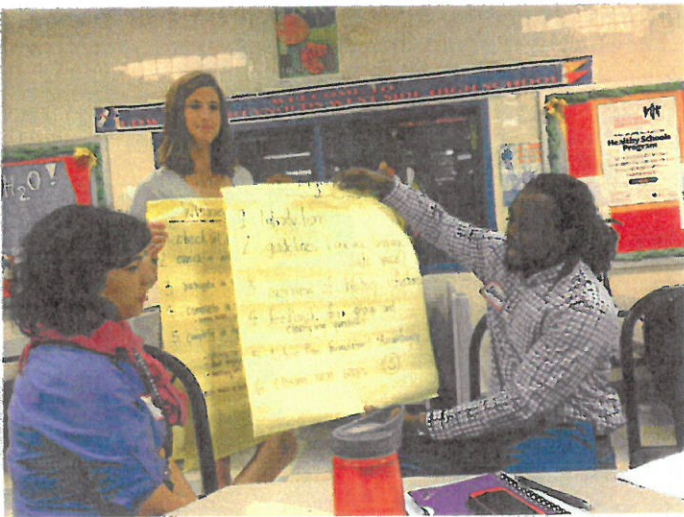
M.S. 22 Parent Coordinator Yaditza Rodriguez remarked on the process:

Usually you hear from different stakeholders on an individual basis, regarding specific circumstances. This was different because we had everyone together, listening and responding to the same thoughts. It was an eye-opener, to say, 'Oh wow, I never thought about it that way,' or 'I didn't know [about someone's experience].' It was very open. There was a high level of comfort. No one felt threatened or afraid.

Among the many action steps brainstormed were the following proposals:

- A “Big Sibs” program that will match 7th and 8th grade students with incoming 6th grade classes.
- Parent training for building skills in mediation and de-escalating conflicts.
- Building awareness amongst staff of the ladder of disciplinary interventions the school is committed to using and strengthening documentation of how interventions are being implemented.
- Shared training between school staff and SSAs to clarify roles and build unity on how schools will respond to and de-escalate conflict.

A Work in Progress at Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School



West Side staff host a workshop on their restorative justice model during the 2014 National Dignity in Schools Campaign Week of Action.

Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School is another transfer school in Manhattan that, according to its mission, “serves students who have been pushed out of, or become disenchanted with, their previous schools. The staff is dedicated to the belief that every student is capable of success in a nurturing, respectful environment.”

Getting Started

Along with a group of her colleagues, Nicole Riley, school dean and member of Teachers Unite, saw the need to shift school climate at West Side. They connected this need to the larger movement for racial justice in the United States: “The School-to-Prison Pipeline is one of the civil rights issues of our time. As a dean, I was in a position to make transformative change at a transformative school.”

Nicole began looking for alternatives to suspension,

and with a group of West Side staff she attended a restorative justice workshop given by Teachers Unite in 2012. The workshop stressed the need to build a Restorative Justice Action Team (RJAT) dedicated to making change in the school. Over the next three years, the school developed a team that helped create new practices and structures in the school for building community and responding to harm and conflict in a restorative, rather than punitive, way.

The first task of the RJAT at West Side was to facilitate the creation of core values for the school. The values were created through RJAT meetings (“with food!”) as well as one-to-one conversations with colleagues, lessons with students in advisory classes, and circle conversations with staff, shares Nicole. “We are still working with staff and students on breaking them down and defining what these values look like and sound like at West Side. It’s important to express core values in language that everyone understands.”

In addition to creating core values, the most important aspect of building a restorative school culture at West Side was developing a sense of community, so that **when something happens, staff and students feel a shared stake in their community and the sense that something needs to be restored.** Community-building restorative practices at West Side include conversations had in circles, team building activities, and games. A resource that much of the staff uses is the book *Youth Leadership in Action* by Project Adventure. Wellness and healthy cooking is another way that West Side creates a positive school community. The goal, Nicole says, is that “we all learn to live, learn, and grow in peace, and that we are able to restore our community in a productive way when it is disturbed.”

WEST SIDE HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY VALUES

Honor Learning

- We are analytical, creative, and curious in our life-long quest for knowledge.
- We understand that mistakes are an essential part of learning.
- We set goals and we persist in working toward them through a process of reflection and revision.
- We are resilient.

Honor Justice

- We are guided by fairness, compassion, and love.
- We respect the dignity inherent in all humanity.
- We understand that an injustice to one is an injustice to us all.
- We take personal and collective responsibility for our actions.
- We recognize that justice and equity are critical in all aspects of our lives.

Honor Democracy

- We believe that all voices in our community are valued and deserve to be heard especially when decisions are made on our behalf.
- We understand our responsibility to participate at our “personal best” in our school and in the community.

Honor Self and Others

- We value empathy and we respect our selves and others.
- We work together to ensure a safe space that fosters kindness and mutual support in our school and in our community.
- We engage in the learning process through dialogue (speaking and listening) with others so that we can refine our own thinking.
- The natural conflicts that arise provide opportunities for growth and can be resolved through dialogue.

Honor Wellness

- We treat our selves, others, and our environment with care.
- We know that daily exercise and plenty of sleep help our brains function at their best.
- Food is information for the cells in our body.
- We see wellness as a metaphor for excellence in all areas of our lives.

We hold ourselves responsible for adhering to these community values, as we fulfill the vision and mission of Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School.

Having Difficult Conversations

Often when there is conflict in the school or harm is done, staff facilitate restorative circles. Sometimes parents have participated in circles, and in those situations the school social worker usually helps to organize, prep, and coordinate with all the circle participants. Nicole explains the process:

We use a circle protocol and prep the students before the circle as to what to expect. We start by going around and each saying a positive thing that we appreciate about the student [who has violated a core value]. Then we go around and talk about concerns, and we finish by developing a plan together for moving forward and how we together are going to correct the harm done.

As staff began using these new practices over time, they felt the need to contextualize the work they were doing within a broader struggle to address racism. This is important, Nicole explains, **“because many teachers are unconsciously unaware of their own white privilege and embedded racism. We need to recognize the vast and varied forms of racism that our students face in our society.”** Conversations about race and racism began with staff discussion circles facilitated by Teachers Unite member José Alfaro. Through beginning to have deeper, difficult conversations, Nicole hopes the staff will become closer and inclined toward greater action for change.

A Work in Progress

As she looks into the school year ahead, Nicole feels strongly that more support is needed for schools working to transform their school culture:

We need a coordinator whose job is to organize the community for restorative practices. We also need money for quality professional learning around Restorative Justice. We also need money for healthy food and experiential learning, as well as youth training and leadership in facilitating circles and mediations.

Many schools are reporting similar needs, and Nicole is hopeful that the Department of Education will invest in schools: “We are a work in progress. We are building on a tradition at West Side of peace, justice, and humane caring of students with love. I hope that all schools can be supported to transform to be caring communities.”

Bushwick Campus: Restorative Justice and the Community School

Bushwick Campus houses four small high schools: Academy for Environmental Leadership (AEL), Academy of Urban Planning (AUP), Brooklyn School for Math and Research (BSMART), and Bushwick School for Social Justice (BSSJ). The four schools, along with support and training from community partner Make the Road New York (MRNY), have been working collaboratively since 2009 to implement positive restorative approaches to school climate and discipline. They have worked to address racial disparities in suspensions, improve educational outcomes, and create a school-wide approach grounded in safety, respect and dignity for all.



Make the Road New York youth leaders and students at Bushwick Campus learn restorative justice practices together.

and safety. Each school can have an individualized approach to positive school discipline, yet overall there must also be alignment and shared strategy across the campus to achieve success and a positive school culture for all.

Community School Initiative

The 2015-2016 school year is a pivotal moment at Bushwick Campus, as the four schools begin their first full year as a campus Community School. The community school model seeks to bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families, and communities. As community schools seek to counter educational inequities and promote mentorship, youth development, and holistic support services, they must minimize punitive and exclusionary discipline measures. Restorative Justice as a framework for school discipline embodies the very definition of a community school, re-enforcing the connection between school and community rather than isolation and removal.

Through the NYC Department of Education Community School Initiative, MRNY secured training and support to further restorative justice implementation on campus. Eric Butler, a well-known restorative practitioner and facilitator, led a powerful training for 30 youth from the Bushwick community, many of whom attend Bushwick Campus. All Community School Youth Ambassadors (YAs) participated in the trainings and were provided with some tools to implement practices on campus this school year. As a peer-to-peer leadership body, the YAs will promote positive school climate.

What began as a peer-to-peer conflict resolution program grew to include the implementation of a robust peer mediation program and the launch of a campus-wide Restorative Justice Committee. Each school identified school-based practices and infrastructure to best meet their individual needs, from developing core norms and values to forming a Justice Circle or Student Justice Council (SJC). Trainings have been essential in developing a framework for incorporating restorative circles and other restorative approaches into practice. **All stakeholders have acknowledged how critical it is to have a campus-wide approach when addressing school climate**

"I learned that you don't need to worry if you are different. Difference makes us who we are. And when conflict does arrive, as it always will, it will be easier to solve because we have strong relationships."

– Felicite Dambre, BSSJ
12th grade student and
Community School Youth
Ambassador

Eric Butler will return during the 2015-2016 school year to facilitate a similar intensive training for school staff. The New York Peace Institute will also facilitate two restorative circle trainings over the course of the school year. **This training will help to further integrate the use of circles within advisories, classrooms and other spaces throughout campus.** Additionally, the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond will facilitate a two-day workshop on Undoing Racism & Community Organizing. The workshop will help the school community examine how race and class manifest in this country and in our schools, and how they contribute to the racial disparities in school discipline policies that we seek to change through implementation of restorative practices.

Youth Leadership

Youth leadership is a critical component of all school-based initiatives MRNY leads and supports. Both the Community School and Restorative Justice initiatives include youth leadership bodies of students who plan, facilitate and implement these programs across campus. **Trainings, education, and support for young people in these roles must be prioritized** to foster their growth in becoming effective decision makers and leaders. This is essential to transform schools and build a strong, safe school climate where students are valued, respected and engaged in their vision of academic success.

"The key to peer mediation and SJC [Student Justice Council] is positivity, creativity, and open-mindedness. Students and staff are challenging themselves to think differently about the way they solve conflict and build community"

– Alex Lopez, 12th grade student at BSSJ and Student Justice Council member

"If you are having an issue, don't be afraid to speak up and be open minded about other people's problems. [Peer mediation] really does work. Whenever I facilitate a mediation I always check back with the students later and found that their relationship had always improved."

– Aminata Coulibaly, 12th grade student at BSSJ and peer mediator

Restorative Justice Through the Lens of Racial Justice

School districts around the country are looking to end racial disparities in punitive discipline and to create restorative, inclusive school communities that respect the dignity of all students. This, in part, means reducing suspensions overall, but depends on a more intentional approach to overcome the racialized lens through which discipline is currently practiced in public schools. Since the passage of the Student Safety Act in 2010, which reports the number of suspensions in New York City schools, there have been fewer suspensions reported each year, but, troublingly, the disparities for Black students and students with special needs remained unchanged. In the work of shifting school climate and creating restorative, inclusive communities, many schools are finding that talking directly about race and racism with students and school staff is necessary for any real transformation to take place. More and more students, educators, and families are refusing to take a race-blind approach to transforming school culture and discipline practices. The following organizations and resources may be useful for schools beginning this conversation:

Border Crossers (bordercrossers.org)

Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real about Race in School edited by Mika Pollock

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond:
Undoing Racism Workshop (pisab.org)

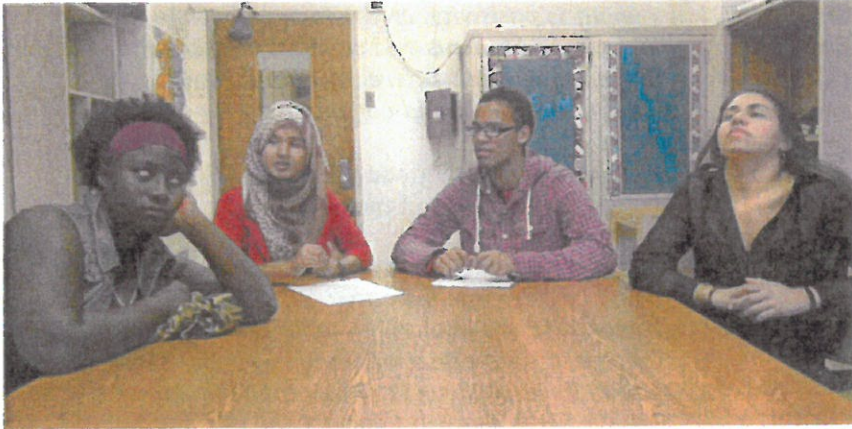
Project Implicit (tinyurl.com/harvardimplicit)

Teachers Unite (teachersunite.org)



Members of the national Dignity in Schools Campaign make a call to action at the 2015 annual member meeting.

Spotlight on Youth-Centered Peer Mediation



Students lead a role play during student-led peer mediation training at the International Community High School.

DREAM! / Safety with Dignity (formerly Mass Transit Street Theater) partnered with two South Bronx schools, Frederick Douglass Academy III (FDA) and the International Community High School (ICHS), to facilitate a peer mediation program during the 2014-2015 school year. In addition to training mediators, the program includes all-school assemblies and classroom visits facilitated by peer mediators. The program provides multiple benefits: resolving student conflicts, creating youth leaders, and changing school culture.

Peer mediators become leaders and change agents within their schools. One ICHS mediator reflected: “Mediation can impact the school in good ways; you can leave a mark - being able to help the community is a really powerful thing.” An FDA mediator helped with summer orientation and told incoming freshmen they should come to him if they were having problems with other students. This set the tone for their entry, so that freshmen know that fighting is not the norm and that there are other ways to solve conflict. A senior mediator reflected on the program’s impact:

There used to be lots of problems, the upperclassmen had problems with each other, fights were happening a lot. The first year there were a lot of mediations. It carried over. Now people are cool with each other. The assembly and posters help them to think. We gave them buttons [Don't Hate - Mediate] and it had an effect on how they think about fighting.

In spite of proven benefits, schools may struggle to implement and maintain a peer mediation program because of the demands each mediation makes on staff time. At ICHS, DREAM! helped the school hire a trained mediator housed at a community-based organization to assist the school staff for six hours a week. The assistant helped collect mediation requests, and coordinated, supervised, and followed up on mediations. They also facilitated the lunchtime Peer Mediation Club and a peer mediation promotion campaign. The number of scheduled and completed mediations jumped from 0 to 33 after the assistant was hired. The success of the program, which included mediations between students and adult staff, led to the development of a strategic two-year plan to further shift the culture of the school and integrate restorative practices into every aspect of the school’s instruction and discipline.



Photos of peer mediators and DREAM! staff from the year together at Frederick Douglass Academy III.

For more information, visit dare2dreambx.org

Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York: A Vision for School Safety and Climate

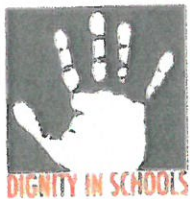


Students, educators, parents, and community advocates speak out at a press conference calling for an end to suspensions for “defying authority,” a Discipline Code behavior infraction shown to have high racial disproportionality across the country. School districts outside of New York City have begun removing the infraction from discipline policies, but NYC students can still be suspended for it.

The Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York (DSC-NY) believes that changing policy to reduce the number of suspensions is a key element of stopping student pushout. DSC-NY advocates for the resources schools need for **staffing and professional development**, as well as **youth and parent trainings and leadership structures**, to create whole-school transformations. In order to foster positive school climates, the students, educators, parents, and advocates that make up DSC-NY are **calling on the Mayor and Schools Chancellor to:**

- **Implement a Restorative and Inclusionary Discipline Code that:**
 - ◊ Prohibits overly-punitive, exclusionary discipline;
 - ◊ Mandates guidance interventions; and
 - ◊ Ends long-term suspensions of more than 10 days.
- **Invest in positive discipline**, including whole-school Restorative Justice models, full-time staff in schools to coordinate restorative practices and positive discipline, central Department of Education resources to assist schools, and student and parent leadership teams at the school and district level.
- **Invest in student support services**, including guidance and counseling services, student success centers, school-based health services, leadership development and other extra-curricular programming, and translation services.
- **Remove all scanners and metal detectors from NYC schools.**

Learn about some of the organizations that supported the schools featured in this case study



Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York (DSC-NY) is a citywide coalition of students, parents, advocates, educators and lawyers calling for positive, school-wide approaches to discipline that improve the school environment, reduce conflict, and increase learning. We work to reduce suspensions and other harsh discipline practices that violate students' human rights to education and dignity, and to ensure that students, parents and educators have a right to participate in decision-making related to discipline policies in schools. (dignityinschools.org/dsc-ny)

Make the Road New York promotes economic justice, equity and opportunity for all New Yorkers through community and electoral organizing, strategic policy advocacy, leadership development, youth and adult education, and high quality legal and support services. The Youth Power Project supports youth ages 14 to 21 in leading community change efforts on issues of concern to them. Our work includes school-based programming that supports young people in accessing college and job opportunities; partnerships with two new innovative high schools that we helped to design and launch; and an array of after school programs that support young people in developing leadership, literacy, group work, and community organizing skills. (maketheroad.org)



NESRI

NATIONAL ECONOMIC &
SOCIAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE

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212-253-1710 EXT. 314
INFO@NESRI.ORG

The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) works in partnership with communities to build a broad movement for economic and social rights, including health, housing, education and work with dignity. NESRI's education initiatives work with education advocates and organizers to promote policy change in public education using human rights standards and strategies. NESRI believes that human rights offer a framework for transforming our public schools based on standards of equity, accountability, dignity and community participation. The initiatives work in collaboration with community partners to generate human rights documentation, analysis, advocacy, public education materials and training resources. (nesri.org)

The New Settlement Parent Action Committee (PAC) is an award-winning multicultural organization of concerned parents and community members fighting for educational justice for young people and families in the South Bronx and citywide. We have fought and won campaigns for teacher leadership and mentoring, school facility improvement, and reductions in school-based arrests, summonses and suspensions. Since 2012, PAC has coordinated Bronx School Justice (BSJ), a collaborative venue to negotiate increases in positive discipline practices that engages parents, DOE, NYPD School Safety, and community advocates. The accomplishments of BSJ include reductions of more than 60% in school-based arrests and summonses in the Bronx and the first community-led trainings on the school-to-prison pipeline for more than 1,000 NYPD School Safety Agents. (facebook.com/parentaction)



Teachers Unite is an independent membership organization of public school educators in New York City collaborating with youth and parents to transform public schools. We resist institutions that segregate and criminalize Black and Latino/a youth, such as the school-to-prison pipeline, by organizing educators to work as allies in local and national campaigns for social and economic justice. We develop and share resources for restorative justice and school-based power-building that promote grassroots leadership in public education, and we conduct collaborative research on pressing educational issues. (teachersunite.org)

For more information about this case study series
email info@dignityinschools.org or call 212-253-1710 ext. 314.