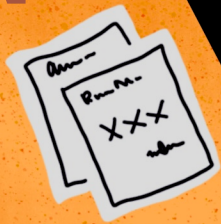




BEYOND SUSPENSION DECLINE:



*Transforming School Discipline
in California*



Beyond Suspension Decline:

Transforming School Discipline in California

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School climate, culture, and safety are a perennial concern for all stakeholders in schools—including parents, students, teachers, counselors and school leaders. These inter-related school conditions influence whether students want to attend school, how focused they can be on learning, teachers' ability to teach, teachers' excitement and pride in their craft, and leadership retention.

As many educators point out, school climate, culture, and safety is the water that school communities swim in — and can run the gamut from invigorating to toxic. Disciplinary approaches and systems are often the most visible and identifiable tools school leaders and educators use to shape and navigate these waters.

These disciplinary approaches and systems impact academic and social outcomes.¹ More importantly, they teach young people what to expect from society and their place in it.

In many classrooms and communities students continue to be told that education is the great equalizer and that if they stay seated, do their work, raise their hands to speak, follow directions quickly, and remain well-behaved, they will land a good job and enjoy a good life.

The American Dream, accepted and venerated as truth, is that education provides the opportunity for everyone to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. However, this truth fails to extend to the vast majority of Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other youth circumscribed to poverty. Despite entering school with high hopes for education, research shows that positive connection to, and perception of, school decline over time — and this decline is more pronounced for lower-income students and students of color.²

Students who question the school-to-low-wage-labor or -nothing pipeline, act out or opt out. Schools — resource strapped and unequipped — often resort to suspension, expulsion, deficit narratives, and increased partnerships with law enforcement.

Beyond Suspension Decline shares the findings from the largest qualitative study of school climate and discipline in the state of California and provides an analysis of recent efforts to challenge punitive and exclusionary school discipline. Findings summarize four years of case study data across 34 schools in 17 California districts that span urban, suburban, and rural schools from the Oregon to Mexico borders.³

What we know is — there is no quick fix to overly punitive and exclusionary school systems. And there is no quick fix to repair the harm Black, Indigenous, and Latinx youth experience in California school systems. To improve schools we must better understand the root problem, identify the institutional supports and obstacles educators and communities encounter as they attempt to create change, and recognize the individual strategies and practices that are promising.

Our research finds that the incorrect framing or understanding of the problem; construction of solutions without acknowledgment of the pre-existing institutional footholds or barriers; or the lack of a vision and models of better alternatives lead efforts astray and leave educators and organizers burned out.

We hope *Beyond Suspension Decline* impresses upon readers the complexity of “changing the water” of school climate, culture, and discipline in schools. We hope this report also contributes to the ongoing analysis, reflection, and re-imagination of schools.

THE STUDY

After a decade or more of awareness building, community organizing, activism, and school discipline policy reform,⁵ statewide school discipline data show mixed and sometimes confusing results. California schools achieved a reduction of school suspensions, particularly between 2011 and 2015, when the average rate fell from 5.8% to 3.8%.

However, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students continue to be disproportionately suspended and expelled, and for subjective reasons.⁶ Moreover, violence, victimization, bullying, and harassment in middle schools improved over this period, and yet the percentage of students who experienced caring relationships with adults, high expectations from teachers, opportunities for meaningful participation, and positive perceptions of school safety declined.⁷

Our interdisciplinary research team of diverse educators, researchers, and lawyers interviewed 553 administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students and community-based organization leaders. We observed 291 classrooms over 191 researcher-days and shadowed a diverse spectrum of students with varying degrees of interactions with school discipline systems. We expanded our observations beyond instructional time to staff meetings, school activities, school suspension rooms, community centers, and restorative justice spaces.

WE SOUGHT TO ANSWER:

1. How have school disciplinary cultures (i.e., narratives, norms, and practices) changed in California?

2. What strategies and conditions support efforts to move away from punitive or exclusionary school discipline practices? What obstacles remain?

3. What role has an ecosystem of community-based and advocacy organizations in California, and a core funder, The California Endowment, played in these efforts?

The extensive interviews and observations often produced more questions and required critical thought about how to organize such a large amount of data for our readers.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- School and district leaders share a common narrative that zero-tolerance policies do not work and school suspensions are not useful for improving student behavior or learning. While rightfully celebrated as a win, we found that administrators rarely cite the disproportionate impact of suspensions and expulsions on students of color as central to their efforts to shift disciplinary practices. This may partially explain the scarcity of race conscious solutions and the persistent racial discipline gap. See pp. 21 - 22.
- School climate, culture, and discipline improve the most in schools that experience or pursue changes to deeper organizational structures first. We found this to be true of schools with a decline in overall enrollment and in schools that intentionally create smaller learning communities, increase teacher collaboration time, dismantle punitive dean of students positions and in-school suspension rooms, expand student leadership and organizing opportunities, and offer robust social and emotional supports. Otherwise, add-on programs, like a restorative justice coordinator position with little power, become afterthoughts, and schools regressed quickly back to punishment when funding for these programs ceased. See pp. 65 - 75.
- For successful school transformation, school leaders must hold capacity-oriented perspectives of both adults and students. School leaders who hold capacity-oriented perspectives of both adults and students encourage teacher leadership, foster respectful and professionally engaging adult communities, make time for staff collaboration, and support adults to support youth leadership and activities. See pp. 69 - 70.
- Despite reducing suspensions and expulsions, punitive and exclusionary attitudes and practices co-exist with positive and supportive practices like restorative justice (RJ) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in most schools. Schools without articulated alternative discipline approaches tend to default to punitive, exclusionary, and social control orientations to discipline. See pp. 28 - 30.
- School police remain a steady presence in schools. While educators widely accept police as a necessary, only a minority of teachers have actual interactions with school police. Simultaneously, escalation, criminalization, aggression, and violence characterize police interactions when they do occur. Reports of police escalating violence in schools occurred more often in schools that serve Black and Indigenous youth. See pp. 31 - 34.
- School disciplinary systems continue to remove students to a complex system of continuation schools and alternative education facilities. In many instances, these facilities act as warehouses where little instruction takes place. See pp. 34 - 36.
- As districts require administrators to reduce suspensions, school administrators turn to in-school suspension and detention rooms. While many administrators voice their intent to use in-school suspension and detention rooms as restorative spaces — and in a few schools, this was true — nothing educative or restorative occurs in a majority of these rooms. See pp. 36 - 37.
- While Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is the most widely adopted alternative discipline intervention and encourages more educative approaches to school discipline, PBIS aligns well with more social control tendencies in schools and co-exists seamlessly with punitive and exclusionary practices. We find that in the schools with the fullest implementation of PBIS, PBIS is the proverbial “carrot” that justifies the continued use of the “stick”. See pp. 51 - 52.

- Mechanisms and justifications for racially disproportionate punishment vary by school context, but always results in the exclusion and punishment of those students already at the margins of society. In schools serving smaller Black populations, we observe fairly positive school climates for a majority of students but disproportionate punishment and exclusion of Black students. Educators in schools that serve large numbers of Indigenous students, under-resourced and unable to address years of dispossession and disinvestment, often exhibit a deficit-oriented characterization of Indigenous students that justifies disproportionate punishment. For the many schools that serve predominantly Latinx students, educators justify punitive policies by invoking the idea that many Latinx students belong to gangs despite evidence to the contrary. See pp. 39 - 46.
- State funding policies and district enrollment and personnel practices exacerbate pre-existing inequities that negatively impact schools in historically disinvested Black and Indigenous communities. Without a significant redistribution of financial and human resources to historically Black or Native schools, mandates not to suspend students translate to permissive and apathetic adult cultures, as many adults forego the intellectual purpose of schooling to get through the day. See pp. 77 - 78.
- Organizations committed to multigenerational, insider-outsider organizing that bring together activists, educators, youth and parents in campaigns for racial and economic justice create pockets of hope. In school communities where community advocacy organizations led campaigns with educators to challenge criminalization, militarization, and unequal funding in schools, school discipline reforms extended to restorative teacher-student relationships, relevant and engaging curriculum, and inclusive and safe campuses. See pp. 78 - 79; 87.
- Finally, we found that a core funder, The California Endowment (TCE), facilitated a convergence of interests, shaped a dominant narrative, and supported the expansion of restorative justice in the state. The Endowment funded a communications effort that contributed to a dominant narrative among education leaders in California that suspensions are not working to change student misbehavior and alternatives are necessary. Unfortunately, the dominant narrative lacked an explicit and overarching structural racial analysis in relation to the framing of the school discipline problem and the kinds of solutions necessary. The Endowment also spotlighted restorative justice as an alternative to punishment and exclusion in the state, and contributed to the expansion of the restorative justice field in California. See pp. 80 - 87.

While arguably a product of pragmatic policymaking, five years of case study data across the 34 participating schools suggest that recent school discipline reforms in the state shifted the responsibility of supervising youth from law enforcement and criminal justice to schools. However, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx youth remain actively subject to the carceral logics of our imagined change. Yet, our data reveal bright spots, moments of hope, and promising practices that lay the foundation for future education policy, advocacy, and organizing strategies. What is necessary now?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A coordinated strategy that champions a more explicit structural racial justice analysis in relation to school climate and discipline reform. This strategy must explicitly counter the legacy of racial segregation and disinvestment in Black, Indigenous, and Newcomer communities by investing in schools and community-based organizations in these communities. The strategy must also challenge current school district policies and practices related to funding, attendance, and personnel, that exacerbate existing income and racial inequalities within school districts. Finally, the strategy must support efforts to target and provide alternatives to racist notions perpetuated in schools including deficit-narratives of students and families and racialized notions of safety.
- A coordinated strategy that begins with an unflinching analysis of how schools, police, the criminal justice system, and other social service agencies form a continuous and interdependent youth control complex or school-prison nexus that encloses youth of color, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latinx “gang-affiliated” youth in California. While these systems may act or appear to act to support and protect youth, they do so by identifying, surveilling, harassing, and criminalizing a subsection of the population in any community, often creating both the process and justification for the eventual exclusion of these young people from society.
- A coordinated strategy that treats educators as movement actors, not just movement targets. Teacher and administrators were essential to the success of each of the institutionalization efforts. Where they were strongest, they were well prepared in more restorative approaches through their educator preparation program, aligned discipline to critical pedagogies or leadership philosophies, belonged to wider networks of educators, and were funded to experiment with and share their solutions with others. Teachers, repeatedly targeted, are giving up, with detrimental consequences for young people in schools.
- A coordinated strategy that continues to strengthen the capacity of multi-generational community-organizing to analyze the social and economic conditions impacting youth and work collectively with parents, youth, and educators to improve them. Locally grounded community organizations are critical to identifying and challenging political, economic, and social injustice. Strong regional and statewide networks of these organizations can support skill-building, analysis, power-building, and coordination.
- A coordinated strategy that takes advantage of the existing institutional supports within schools for moving school climate, culture, and discipline away from punishment and social control. For example, assistant principals, who have traditionally acted as the dean of students or disciplinarian, have become much more prominent as potential movers and shakers. These positions would be ideal for individuals with deep youth development, youth empowerment, and restorative justice expertise. Coordinated strategies to create new training opportunities, career pathways, and evolving professional expectations targeted at reframing the traditional role of assistant principals are necessary.
- A coordinated strategy that demands the redistribution of financial and human resources to the schools pushed to the margins of society by antiquated, racist funding and attendance policies. These schools, within historically Black and Indigenous communities, serve the families of our lowest income students. There are a finite number of these schools in the state and our collective responsibility must be to provide the necessary resources to the students and adults in these schools. ◆

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, as in many areas of education, school climate, culture, and safety have become a focus of policymaking at the federal and state levels.

Framed in considerably different ways, some federal administrations construe school climate, culture, and safety to mean zero-tolerance discipline policies, greater partnerships between police and schools, an expansion of school resource officers, security cameras, and metal detectors, and increased use of psychotropic drugs to address student misbehaviors.⁸ Under these administrations, educational programs that pride themselves in teaching a diversifying student body the necessary character or behaviors for work and life are supported by large federal grant programs and flourish nationwide.

Under the Obama Administration, two sets of interests converged⁹ to take school climate, culture, and safety on a slightly new path. Concerns raised by community activists and civil rights advocates about the growing and racially disproportionate school-to-prison pipeline converged with more pragmatic concerns of state governments over declines in criminal justice budgets caused by the Great Recession (2007 - 2009).¹⁰ Nationally, the declining state budgets created an interest convergence to decriminalize youth offenders and demand that schools take on more of the burden of supervising young people. This interest convergence resulted in the creation of what appeared to be a broad national coalition of law enforcement organizations, youth court judges, civil rights organizations, youth

and parent organizing groups, foundations, and organizations conducting research and development on alternative approaches. Federal education policy attention to school climate, culture, and safety turned to the reduction of out-of-school suspensions, the adoption of alternative behavioral interventions to redirect misbehaving students, and the hiring of more school psychologists to strengthen mental health supports. Funding for school police through federal Community Oriented Policing (COPS) grants continued.¹¹

Led by parent and youth organizing groups, California has been the incubator for these reform efforts and at the cutting edge of local efforts to challenge punitive and exclusionary school discipline.¹² These resulted in significant local wins for decriminalization and new approaches to discipline in some school districts such as Los Angeles and Oakland. Mirroring some of the national trends, a convergence of interests spurred by the Great Recession (2007 - 2009) created a policy window for criminal justice and school discipline reform. While not always on equal footing, this interest convergence in California brought together Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a law enforcement policy and lobbying organization, with coalitions of community-based organizations, parent and youth organizing groups, and civil rights legal advocates. As a result, among many bills that failed, the California Legislature passed AB 420 in 2013, prohibiting suspensions for willful defiance for students in kindergarten through third grade.

The following year, the California State Legislature required school districts to include plans (i.e., goals, actions, and expenditure allocations) for reducing suspensions and improving school climate and culture within their Local Control and Accountability Plans.¹² AB 420 became permanent in 2018 and expanded in 2019 with SB 419, which included prohibiting willful defiance suspensions for fourth and fifth grade permanently and banning them for sixth through eighth graders for five years.

Policies for teacher and administrator professionalization have shifted to support a more holistic vision of student health. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing revised professional standards to include creating classroom and school environments that promote students' academic and social well-being in 2009 for teachers and in 2014 for school leadership.¹³ The California Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (CPSEL) specifically attends to school leaders' ongoing engagement with discipline systems and data to ensure equity.

In California, The California Endowment (TCE) has been a core funder and one of the key conveners and facilitators of many of these efforts.¹⁴ With the help of community partners, the Endowment successfully connected the issue of over and racially disproportionate use of suspensions to student health and well-being in schools, striving to create more positive and supportive learning environments that promote life-long health and wellness in all students. Since 2010, the Endowment provided \$1.75 billion in funding and initiated a diverse set of strategies, including organizing, youth development, communications, coalition-building, capacity-building, and research.¹⁵ Other reports describe these efforts in more detail.¹⁶

Committed both to funding entities involved in policy change, as well as the translation of these policies into sustained institutional change within schools, the Endowment's statewide School's Team and their place-based Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Team have experimented with a variety of funding and support strategies aimed at institutionalizing non-punitive and non-exclusionary school discipline practices in schools.¹⁷

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Among other statewide strategies, the Endowment provided a total of \$1 million in competitive grants to school districts in the Central Valley of California to adopt more positive or restorative school disciplinary systems.¹⁸ Grants ranged from \$60,000 to \$200,000 per district and funded activities such as teacher and parent training in restorative justice (RJ) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), teacher release time, PBIS materials, and coordinators. Along with funding, school districts were invited to participate in a regional Leadership and Learning Network. Beginning in 2018, TCE has also funded Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) to regularly convene a virtual statewide learning community on restorative justice, providing a space for educators, restorative justice practitioners, and researchers to build and share expertise.

Within the Building Healthy Communities place-based initiatives, program officers in 14 geographic regions in California continued to fund and support local education justice hubs, coalitions, and particular school initiatives. [These activities fell into four primary funding strategies:](#)

- Community organizing efforts, which resulted in the adoption of positive school discipline policies in six school districts, serving a total of more than 331,403¹⁹ students.
- Legal advocacy, which resulted in at least one case brought against a school district in the state for discriminatory school discipline.
- Districtwide school discipline initiatives, which funded individual school district central offices to lead, organize, and coordinate school discipline reform efforts.
- School-level experimentation, which funded school leaders and teams to study, select, train, and experiment with alternative approaches to school discipline.

In these and other efforts, the Endowment's investment in cycles of learning and evaluation supported the evolution of their strategies. Alongside funding for the use and growth of the School Climate Indicators on the California Healthy Kids Survey, TCE funded local evaluation teams to capture and share stories, and provide data upon which to reflect.

[What has been the impact of these efforts?](#)

Relevant quantitative data show mixed and sometimes confusing results. As a whole, statewide school discipline data show an overall decline in suspensions, particularly between the 2011-12 and 2014-15 academic school years.²⁰ During the first few years of collecting and reporting statewide suspension data, suspension rates fell from an average of 5.8% to 3.8% in the state. However, statewide suspension data show that suspension rates have remained relatively stable, ranging between 3.5% and 3.7% every academic year since.

Perhaps more puzzling, however, is that more nuanced school climate indicators such as those collected by the California Healthy Kids Survey show that in middle schools, violence, victimization, bullying, and harassment have improved; yet, school connectedness remains stable at roughly 60% of students responding favorably, and 40% responding neutrally or negatively.²¹ Four other key school climate indicators — Caring Adult Relationships, High Expectations, Opportunities for Meaningful Participation, and Perceptions of School Safety — declined between 2011 and 2019. It is important to note that only 40% of middle school students in 2011 - 2013 reported having opportunities for meaningful participation in school, and this number fell to just 35% in 2017 - 2019. Middle school students reporting favorable feelings of school connectedness and the presence of caring relationships hovered around 63% during the same period. Perceptions of school safety increased between 2013 and 2017 and declined between 2017 and 2019.

These data suggest that even as schools reduce suspensions, student perception of school climate, culture, and learning are not great. These quantitative data raise additional questions—questions that qualitative data and methods are particularly adept at answering.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1. How have school disciplinary cultures (i.e., narratives, norms, and practices) changed in the subset of California schools in this study?
- 2. What strategies and conditions have supported efforts to move away from punitive or exclusionary school discipline practices? What obstacles remain?
- 3. What role has an ecosystem of community-based and advocacy organizations in California, and a core funder, The California Endowment, played in these efforts?

The qualitative data in this study allow us to examine the depth of actual changes; what these changes in school discipline mean or do not mean for students, families, and teachers’ experience of school climate, culture, and safety; and what strategies have led to particular outcomes.

These lessons intend to inform those at different levels and places within the system, and recognize that systemic change is difficult, necessary, and a perpetual place of struggle — and joy. This study builds upon the Central Valley School Discipline Learning Project, a developmental evaluation undertaken as a partnership between TCE program

managers, learning & evaluation managers, and an interdisciplinary team of researchers. The research design was expanded to include Northern and Southern California, and schools not directly funded by the Endowment. The resulting study is likely the largest qualitative comparative study of school climate, culture, and discipline in the state.

This team of researchers and grantmakers co-created the research design, deciding upon research questions, sampling methods, and data sources. The strength of developmental evaluations over traditional evaluations is that the process embeds researchers within a work team to produce context-specific research that can be utilized immediately to inform grantmaking strategies and educational efforts.²² Developmental evaluation processes encourage curiosity, honesty, and a culture of learning within work teams. ♦

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RESEARCH DESIGN

To examine the impact of the diverse grantmaking strategies utilized by The California Endowment's (TCE) Building Healthy Communities (BHC) place-based strategy and the impact of statewide strategies, researchers used a qualitative comparative case study method. Researchers identified case study districts within the BHC program and chose five additional case study districts outside of BHC as matched comparisons.

Researchers solicited participation from school districts that shared size, demographic, and geographic similarities with the school districts in BHC. Not all school districts solicited participated in the study. The resulting districts vary in geographic region, size, and demographics of students served.

Focal secondary schools within the case study districts were selected in conversation with district or community leaders. These schools often represented what district and community leaders believed to be "furthest along" in their efforts to move away from punitive and exclusionary discipline and/or in implementing alternative approaches such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Restorative Justice (RJ). Focal schools were middle and high schools, since they are shown in research and in the quantitative school climate data to be the schools with the greatest level of punitive and exclusionary discipline. Of the 31 focal schools in our sample, 16 were comprehensive high schools, nine were comprehensive middle schools, and six were alternative education facilities (i.e., continuation schools, community schools, and independent studies facilities). We visited four additional elementary schools that we did not formally include in the analysis of this report. Researchers terminated data collection earlier than intended due to the worldwide

coronavirus pandemic, which abruptly closed schools in March 2020. The resulting 31 focal schools differ along important conceptual dimensions that reflect the diversity of a large state like California. The focal schools vary in urbanicity, size, district size, demography, geography, and political-economic context. As a whole, 15 focal schools were rural, four suburban, and 12 urban. Fifteen schools were small (less than 600 students), seven medium-sized (600 – 1,100 students), and nine large (1,300 – 3,300 students).²³ District size also varied, with 17 focal schools in small districts (500 – 10,000 students), 10 in medium districts (21,000 – 72,000 students), and four in large districts (120,000 – 600,000 students).

We found that the student demographics for our focal schools fell into two broad categories: either predominantly Latinx, which we defined as having student bodies of over 90% Latinx students, or diverse.²⁴ We also found it useful to differentiate the "diverse" schools further to describe the presence or absence of Black and Indigenous students given the ways in which policing and suspensions disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous communities. We considered 10 focal schools predominantly Latinx, nine focal schools as diverse and enrolling a sizable number of Black (~20%) or Indigenous students (~15%), seven focal schools

as diverse and enrolling some Black or Indigenous students (~ 5–10%), and five diverse schools enrolling few, if any, Black students. Researchers located 17 focal schools in the Central Valley region of California, eight focal schools in Northern California, and six focal schools in Southern California. See Appendix A for a summary table describing focal schools.

Case study data consisted of interviews with district central office administrators, school site leaders, school site staff, teachers, and community-based organization leaders associated with school discipline efforts when available. Researchers also held focus groups with students. Where possible, we requested

to hold separate focus groups with student leaders and students who had a great deal of contact with the disciplinary system of their school.

In all comprehensive schools, researchers shadowed eighth or ninth graders through their school day, observing class periods, passing periods, lunch, before and after school, and assemblies. Researchers generally shadowed students on different academic tracks. In total, researchers spent a total of approximately 191 researcher-days collecting data and observed approximately 291 class periods. [See Figure 1 below for a chart summarizing data sources.](#)

Figure 1: Data Sources

DATA TYPE		DESCRIPTION
INTERVIEWS (Evidence of Narrative Change, Norms Change)	<i>District Office</i> (N=37)	Superintendent, Student Services, Alternative Interventions
	<i>School Site</i> (N = 270)	Principals, Assistant Principals, Alternative Interventions, School Resource Officers, Teachers, Counselors, Other staff
	<i>Community</i> (N = 51)	CBO Leaders, Teacher Union Leaders, etc.
	<i>Students in Focus Groups</i> (N = 195)	Student Leaders, Identity Group Leaders, Students with High Contact with Discipline, In-Between Students
OBSERVATIONS (Evidence of Behavior & Procedural Change)	<i>Classroom Observations</i> (N ≈ 291)	Observation of courses through shadowing students and visiting individual classrooms.
	<i>Researcher-Days of Whole School Observations</i> (N ≈ 191)	Observing school culture and climate during lunch, passing period, before school, after school, and assemblies.
DOCUMENTS (Evidence of Policy or Procedural Change)		Policy & procedures, discipline handbooks, Student Accountability Report Cards (SARCs), local media coverage of school discipline.
QUANTITATIVE MEASURES		California Department of Education Data, California Healthy Kids Survey Data

The research team coded interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and observation notes using Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software. Researchers wrote within-case reports for each school and met across teams to locate each school on the School Climate and Culture Quadrants and discuss themes and comparisons across cases.²⁵

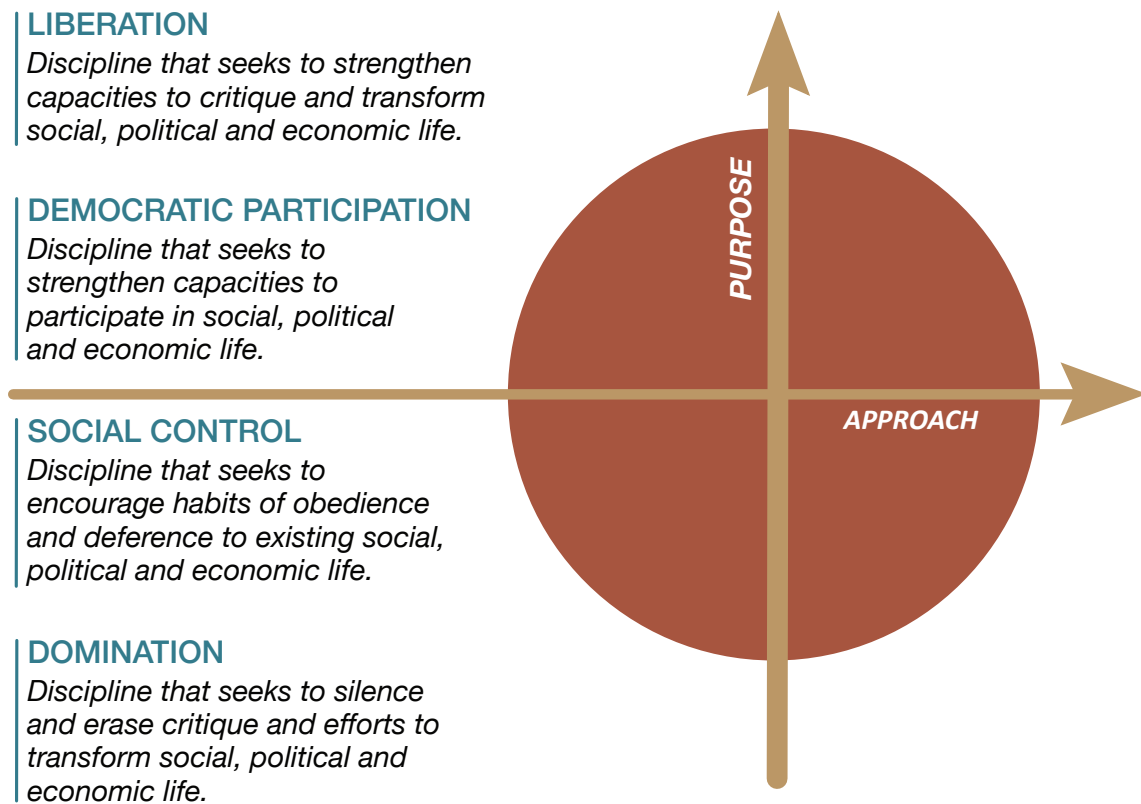
We also collected demographic data such as race, gender, years in education, hometown, and role for each individual. For each focal school, researchers reviewed school websites, School Accountability Report Cards, and pamphlets to capture the school’s mission, principles, and goals; and gathered publicly accessible school discipline data from the California Department of Education.

Researchers wrote within-case reports for each school and met across teams to discuss themes and comparisons across cases. The cross-case analysis was organized in two ways: 1) visualizing the location of each focal school on a School Discipline Purpose & Approach Quadrant and 2) summarizing patterns of interest using cross-case matrices.

First, to visualize and compare case studies, researchers used case study data to chart the location of each comprehensive school on the School Climate and Culture Quadrants. The School Climate and Culture Quadrants emerged from early observations of school discipline practices as a useful visualization of the conflicting purposes of school discipline and manners of achieving school discipline that often co-existed in the same school.²⁶ We found that the quadrants also allowed us to better visualize the connection between how the school was maintaining discipline and for what purpose, which was inextricably linked to teaching and curriculum.

Figure 2: School Climate and Culture Quadrants

PURPOSE OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AXIS



Along the vertical axis, we plotted the primary purpose of school discipline evidenced by our data. Toward the bottom, we charted the schools where the primary purpose of school discipline was *domination* or a discipline that sought to silence critique and efforts to transform social, political, or economic life. Imagine schools that expect students to behave, even when conditions are unfair, punish students for asking questions, and expect students to perform task-oriented work silently and without complaint. Students' identities and autonomy were treated as inappropriate or unacceptable in these schools, and school disciplinary systems were designed to stamp them out. For example, American Indian boarding schools²⁷ exemplify this educational philosophy, historically, in American schooling.

Moving up on the vertical axis, the primary purpose of school discipline became about *social control*, which was less about stamping out student identity and autonomy, but more about inculcating obedience for maintaining the existing social, political, and economic order. Cultural difference was tolerated at the margins so long as students were quiet, produced, behaved, and did as they were told.

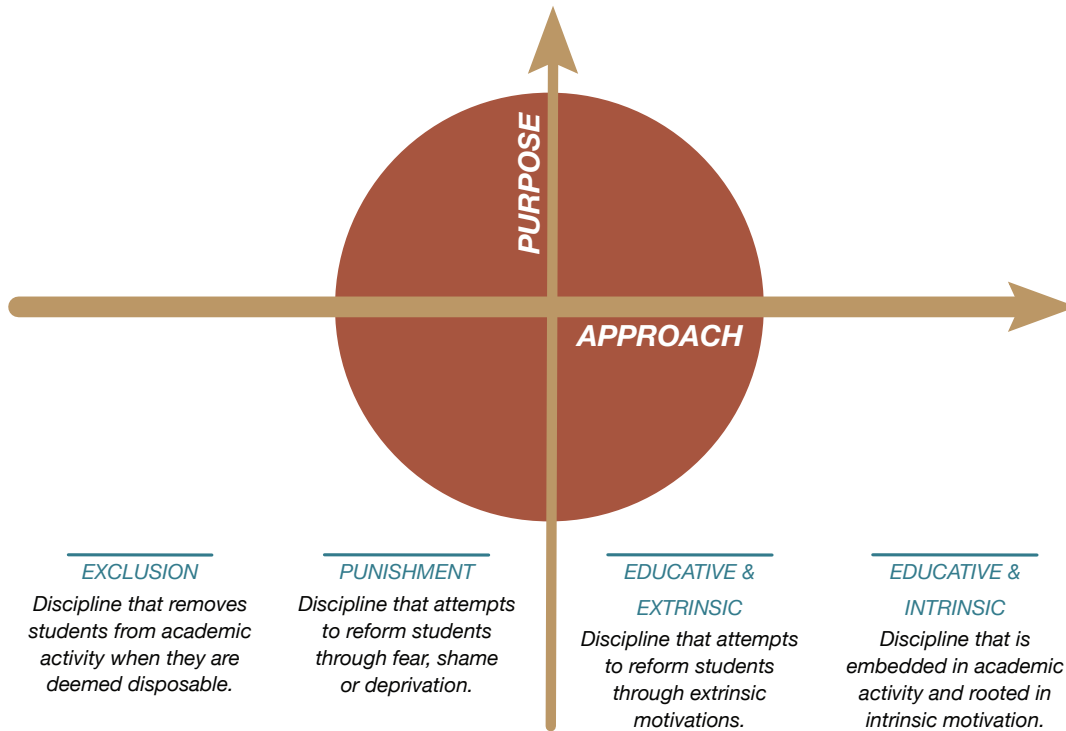
Moving further up the vertical axis, the primary purpose of school discipline became about *democratic participation*, or the teaching of young people to successfully participate in our current social, political, and economic systems. Developing skills and respect for voting, representative government, and the legal system were translated into student government, conflict mediation, and youth court. School discipline in these schools provided opportunities for youth participation in the process, however, the inherent power imbalances and injustices within these systems remained unquestioned.

Finally, at the very top of the vertical axis, the primary purpose for school discipline was to support *education for liberation*, or discipline that seeks to strengthen capacities to critique and transform social, political, and economic life. This concept was articulated by popular educator, Paulo Freire, and taken up by critical educators around the world.²⁸ Imagine a school where students are supported to understand their circumstances, analyze the push and pull of systemic and institutional factors that created those circumstances, and identify short- and long-term goals to change the systems that disrupt their daily lives. A school that prioritizes this purpose would be designed to support youth to "be the change" in the world through its curriculum, teaching methods, organization of the school year and school day, and yes, its discipline systems.

Along the horizontal axis, we charted the approach for achieving school discipline, which has evolved some in recent years, though it co-exists in many of the schools in this study. We plotted exclusion on the far left of the horizontal axis to describe discipline approaches that remove students from academic activity when they are deemed disposable or ineducable. Removal to continuation schools and locked-down educational facilities exemplified this approach. Toward the right, punishment, or discipline that attempts to reform students through fear, shame, or deprivation, does not dispose of students but punishes students into conforming. Punishment spanned various practices ranging from sending students out of class — which is both a form of *exclusion* and a form of deprivation and *punishment* — to verbal reprimands meant to correct behavior.

Figure 3: School Climate and Culture Quadrants

APPROACH FOR ACHIEVING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AXIS



Moving further right, *educative through extrinsic approaches* to school discipline attempts to teach students appropriate behaviors and encourages these behaviors by using extrinsic motivations such as rewards, recognition, and material benefits.

At the furthest right, *educative through intrinsic approaches* to school discipline embeds discipline in academic activity and is rooted in building intrinsic motivations for self-discipline. This looked like a student meticulously detailing an art piece, a class getting lost in a project, or high school students creating an experiential learning curriculum for their younger peers.

Through the School Climate and Culture Quadrants, which we derived from educational theory, the history of school discipline, and observations of contemporary practice, the research team visualized where schools were in comparison to one another (i.e., the location on the Quadrants). We also plotted the range of disciplinary practices observed or

disciplinary purposes expressed through the shape of the plot. Finally, we used arrows to describe the direction that a particular school appeared to be moving on the quadrants. Since the case studies were not longitudinal, the arrow is only used to indicate clear evidence of changes to come (e.g., termination or creation of positions, changes in funding, changes in policy or introduction of new procedures).

In addition, the research team analyzed patterns and themes across cases to create matrices which included summaries of qualitative data by codes and subcodes (e.g., leadership characteristics, implementation strategy, alternative approach adopted, presence or absence of police, institutional supports, institutional obstacles); TCE dimensions of interest (e.g., within or outside BHC, TCE funding strategy, etc.); and existing quantitative data, like school size, school demographics, suspension, and expulsion rates. The matrices identified and confirmed patterns and themes. ◆

THE STATE OF NON-PUNITIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE EFFORTS IN CALIFORNIA

How have school disciplinary cultures changed in this subset of California schools?

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES HAVE CHANGED

The overall decreases in suspension numbers are accompanied by significant changes in district policies and leadership perspectives on suspensions and discipline in our sample schools and districts. These changes have been facilitated, in part, by the advocacy efforts funded by The California Endowment (TCE). While many district policies and school leadership narratives about school discipline have changed, punitive and exclusionary school discipline practices in the schools we studied persist, suggesting that the struggle over school discipline and overall school climate and culture remains critical.

This is not to say that recent efforts to minimize the use of suspensions, implement alternatives to punishment, and invest in student supports are not working. It is to say that in many places where there was evidence of important shifts away from punishment and exclusion, old systems of punishment and exclusion existed, and even where there had been significant gains, we found these gains could be quickly eroded. In the process, there are important lessons that we heard and observed that can inform the continued work in this arena.

As detailed in the introduction, numerous federal and state policies have shifted away from zero-tolerance school discipline as a result of decades of community and youth organizing. These policies began as grassroots efforts in the early 2000s and impacted federal and state policy during the Great Recession. Described more fully in other reports, the Endowment has played a significant role in conceptualizing the Building Healthy Communities approach to place-based advocacy, and has been a key funder and convener of community-based and advocacy organizations who advance health-promoting policies at the local and state levels.²⁹

From our sample, coalitions of community-based organizations and advocacy groups successfully passed districtwide policies that promoted alternatives to suspension in seven of the 17 school districts in our study. One local policy prohibited suspensions under the state category of willful defiance, codified student, parent, and guardian rights to discipline data, established a district team and accountability process to ensure implementation of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and

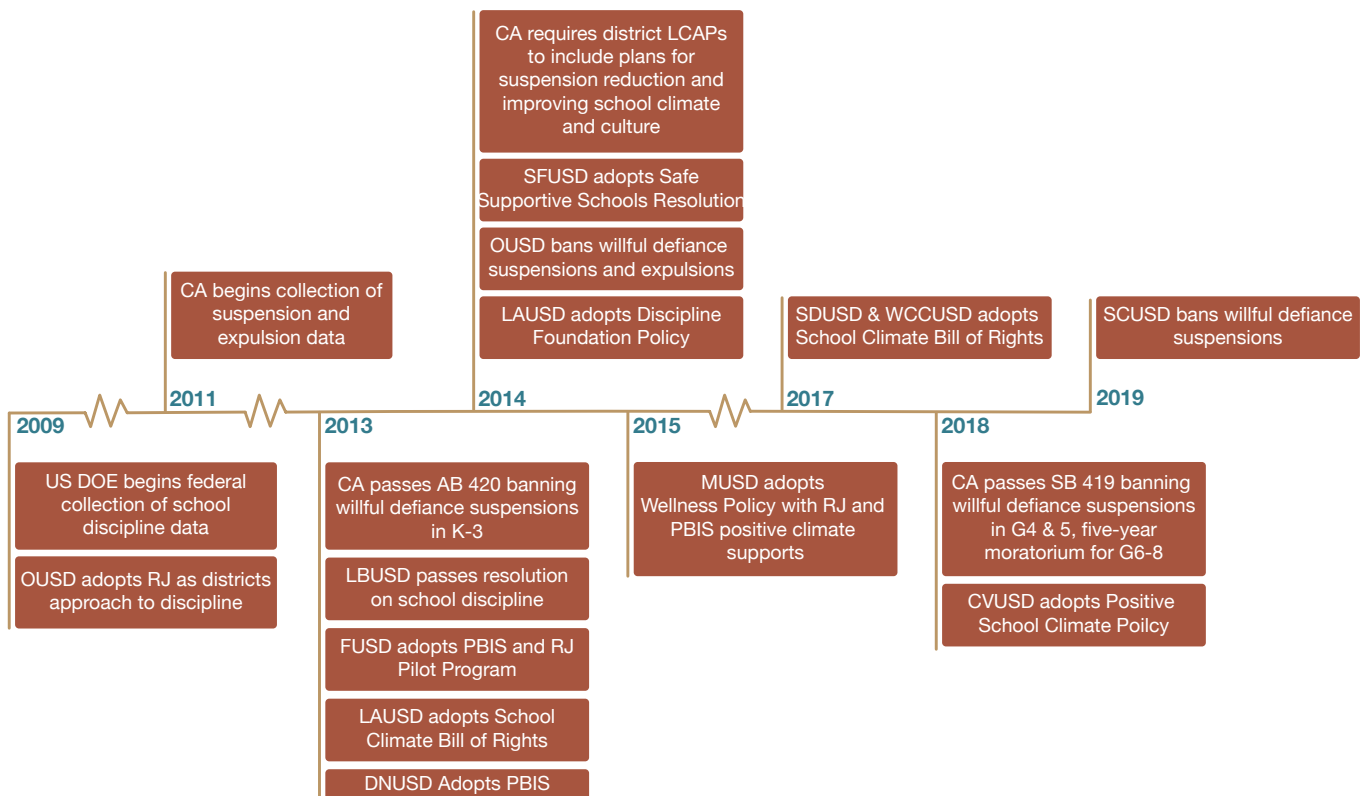
Supports (SWPBIS), and identified restorative justice (RJ) practices as alternatives to conflict.³⁰ Another district policy laid out a Response to Intervention framework that included PBIS and RJ as strategies to reduce punitive discipline.³¹ It also included a Wellness Policy committed to social-emotional learning. Yet another school district adopted a School Climate Bill of Rights that affirmed stakeholder rights to train, implement, and evaluate restorative practices. Some policies also created advisory committees and a central office department dedicated to supporting schools implementing restorative practices.³² In numerous Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP), school districts have committed to building positive school climates with an array of strategies, including PBIS and RJ.³³ These policies are characterized by explicit commitments to a districtwide move away from punitive approaches and support of PBIS and RJ as interventions and strategies that promote a positive school climate.

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From our sample, coalitions of community-based organizations and advocacy groups successfully passed districtwide policies that promoted alternatives to suspension in seven of the 17 school districts in our study.

Figure 4: Timeline of Federal, State, and Local Policies Influenced by TCE Strategies

KEY FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL POLICY INITIATIVES (2009 – 2019)



LEADERSHIP NARRATIVES ECHO

POLICY NARRATIVES

We found that changes in federal and state policies, particularly those that required the collection and reporting of suspension and expulsion data, influenced a change in the narratives of school and district leaders. Among district and school leaders (i.e., superintendents, district office administrators, principals, and assistant principals), we found a pervasive narrative that zero-tolerance state policies regarding suspensions were not working and that suspensions are not a useful tool to foster student success. Superintendents and principals in all regions of California echoed this. Below, we provide some illustrative examples.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA, ADMINISTRATOR:

"I think the good is that we're not suspending folks as much for things that really can be mediated here on campus — defiance, disrespect, disruption.... Especially at our school, we can't continue to exclude folks, because we already have a struggle with students being under-credited. If they're home they're not going to have access to the learning. I feel like in a school like ours, that resolution is very positive."

CENTRAL VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, ADMINISTRATOR:

"I've seen the whole swing from zero-tolerance to now. The last five or six years, the message is to do something besides suspending and expelling kids, to cut down on it. I think it's been a good move. So that's been the big change. And some of it was state, and then at our district level we have a new superintendent, associate superintendent, and they really believe in it. They've pushed it on to the principals. From my office, I support it. I'm kind of like a gatekeeper in

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, ADMINISTRATOR:

"I've suspended my share of kids and suspension doesn't always work. If they're chronic suspensions of the same kids, it doesn't help by just kicking them out of school for a few days and they come back and they don't have any supports or structures for them to cope, to avoid making some of the mistakes in the future."

These narratives about school discipline align with those put forth by TCE-funded advocacy efforts. What’s important to note is that most school administrators described these changes as unshackling educators from earlier state policies that required the suspension and expulsion of students.

We found that district and school leaders’ critiques of suspensions primarily revolved around the ineffectiveness of suspensions to change student behavior and the importance of maximizing instructional time. We heard little mention of the other concerns that first animated community activists, scholars, and advocates to demand change. We did not hear school administrators, teachers, or other school staff talk about the ways that suspensions and expulsions are often racially disproportionate.

Absent too were any concerns about the expansion of school police and other technologies, like surveillance cameras, that made schools more like prisons.³⁴

These findings suggest that currently, district and school leaders widely share the narrative that emerged from TCE’s communication efforts. Those efforts polled likely voters to craft a ‘winnable’ message for state policy change. The policy narrative that suspensions are not working and that suspended students lose instructional time and are not being properly supervised, has taken hold among administrators. Yet, what are the implications for this framing of the problem, and the loss of the broader community concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline or school-prison nexus?

We explore this more in subsequent sections.

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We did not hear school administrators, teachers, or other school staff talk about the ways that suspensions and expulsions are often racially disproportionate.

**SUSPENSION RATES HAVE DECLINED,
AND MORE DRAMATICALLY FOR
SCHOOLS SERVING THE MOST
MARGINALIZED
STUDENTS IN THE STATE**

Suspension rates in California have declined and leveled off, matching a similar pattern nationally (see Figure 5). Average suspension rates in California remain lower and have declined further than national rates of suspension.

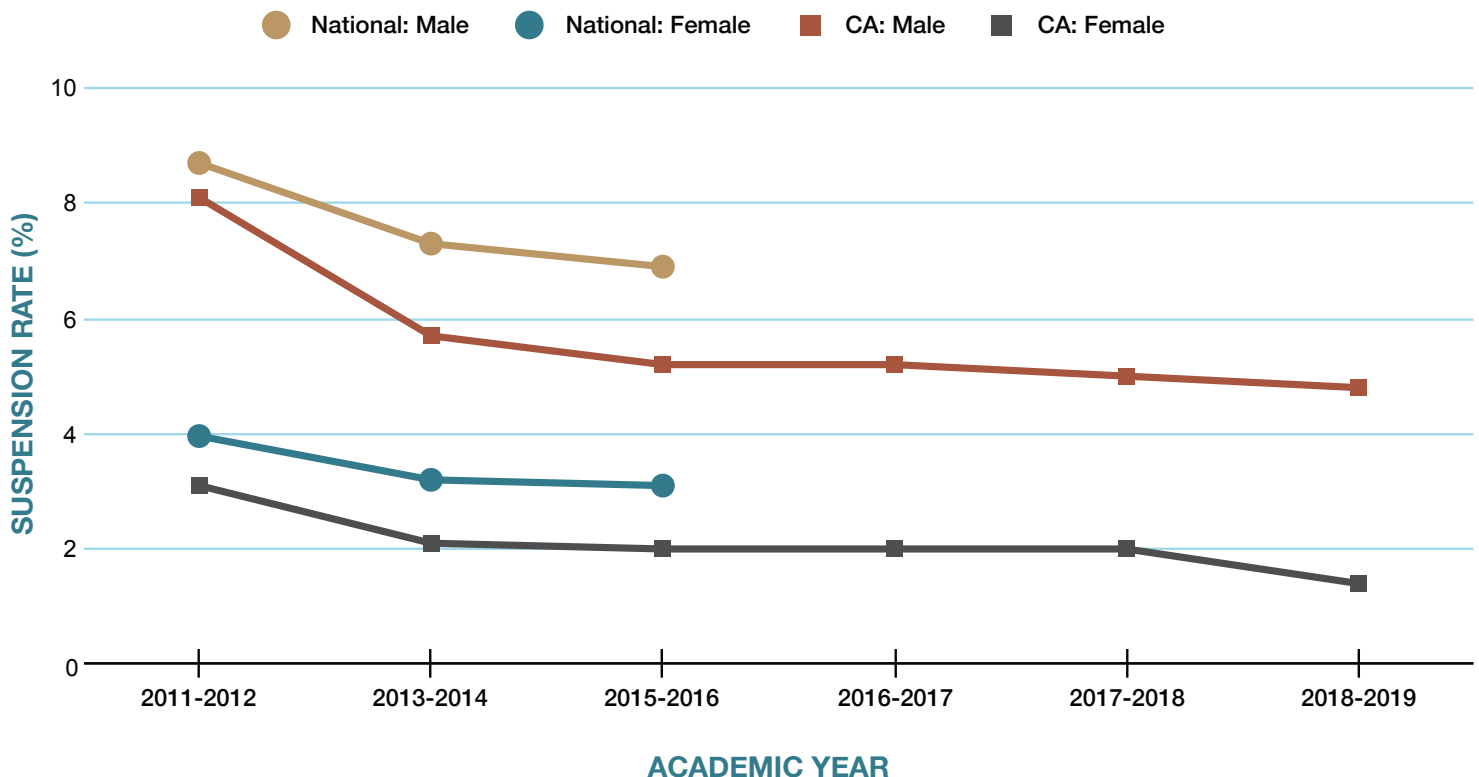
Unfortunately, the termination or temporary halting of the Civil Rights Data Collection under the Trump Administration prevents a complete analysis of how California compares to the nation since 2016.

The Biden Administration’s commitment to reinstating Obama-era school discipline guidance may lead to the resumption of federal school discipline data collection.

Among the focal schools in our study, we found dramatic declines in suspension rates. Twenty-six out of 30 schools (or 86%) within our sample with publicly available suspension data experienced a decrease in suspension rates between the 2011-12 and 2018-19 academic school years (AY). The four schools that experienced an increase during this time were small schools, two of which were small comprehensive schools that regularly had low suspension rates (below 6.2%) and two of which were alternative education sites with suspension rates that fluctuate a great deal from year to year.

Figure 5: National v. California Comparison of Total % Students Suspended One or More Times Over Time and By Sex

NATIONAL AND STATE RATES OF SUSPENSION



(Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights)

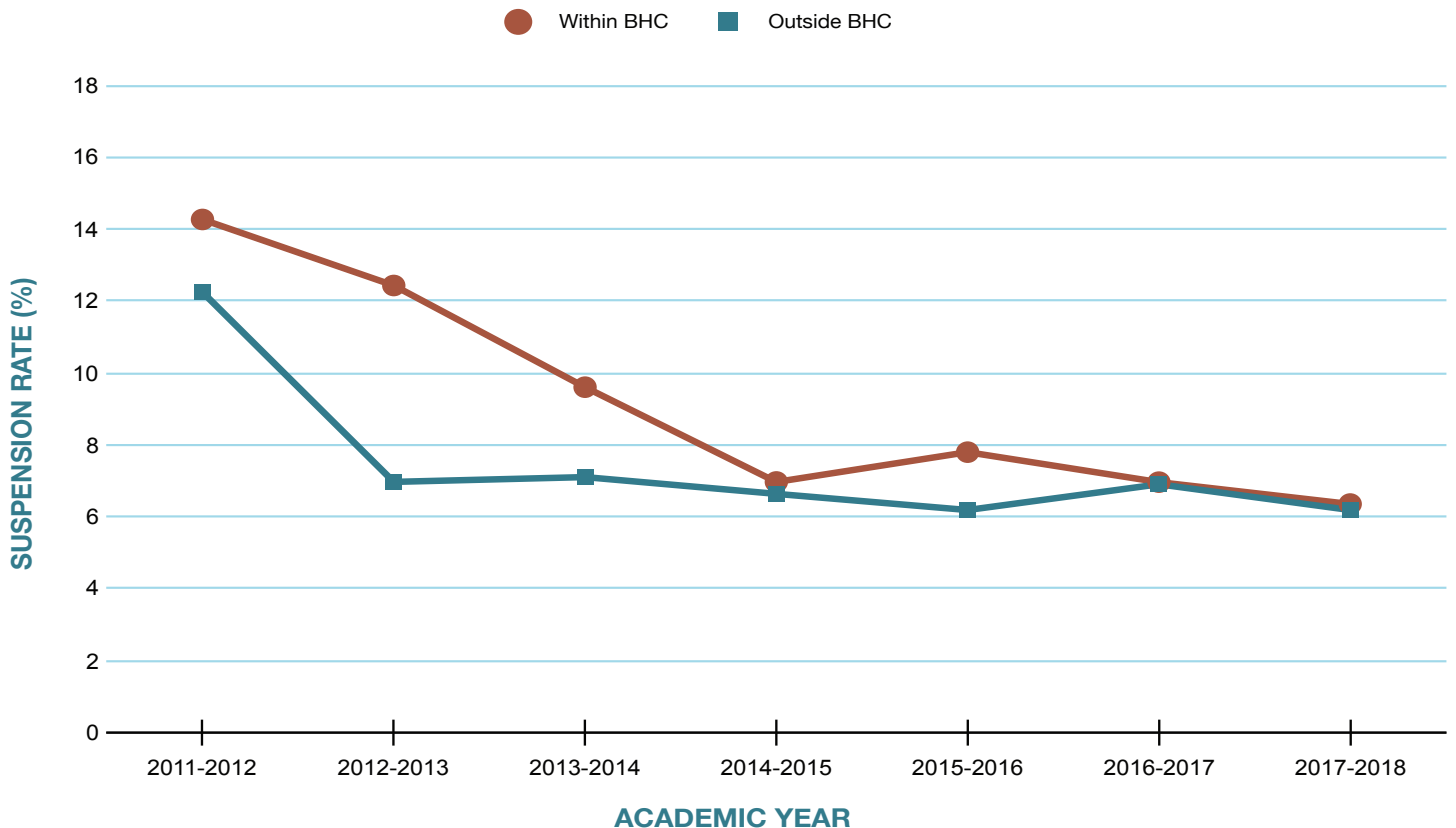
This trend of declining suspensions is true regardless of TCE involvement. We examined the change in suspension rates from 2011–2019, comparing schools located within one of the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) sites to schools not located within a BHC site.³⁵

Among the focal schools located within BHC, average suspension rates (calculated as the percentage of enrolled students suspended one or more times in the given school year) dropped from an average of 14.2% to 5.9% between AY 2011–12 and AY 2018–19³⁶. Among schools located outside of BHC sites, average suspension rates declined from 12.3% to 4.9% during the same time.

The dramatic decline in suspension rates was particularly pronounced in the Central Valley schools in our study, where suspension rates fell from more than 25% in several schools to less than 10% between 2011 and 2019³⁷. Interview data suggest that many schools simply stopped suspending students for small infractions. For example, in one school, a school leader explained that in previous years students who were tardy would be given Saturday school, and then if they did not attend, they would be suspended. Ending this practice reduced their suspensions from approximately 1,200 students in AY 2009–10 to approximately 200 suspensions two years later.

Figure 6: Suspension Rates Over Time of Focal Comprehensive Middle and High Schools by TCE Involvement

AVERAGE SUSPENSION RATES OVER TIME: SCHOOLS GROUPED BY TCE INVOLVEMENT



(Source: California Department of Education)

Consistent with overall state data, schools outside of BHC show a dramatic drop in suspensions in the first year after state data collection, and remain fairly constant thereafter. These dramatic declines in suspension rates precede the implementation of alternative approaches in most schools and precede a majority of the state and local policy reforms. This suggests that in the focal schools outside of BHC, the collection and reporting of suspension numbers alone drove much of the declines in suspensions. Our qualitative data support this. Educators often discussed pressure from district central offices to not suspend students. However, without additional resources, declines in suspensions did not necessarily translate into more supportive or educative alternatives in these schools. We describe this in more detail below.

In contrast, focal schools within BHC sites show a slower but steady decline over four consecutive academic years between AY 2011–2012 and AY 2014–2015, before remaining fairly stable. It is important to note that TCE strategically chose places because they are some of the most economically and politically marginalized communities in the state; thus, the schools also tended to have higher levels of punishment and exclusion. Notably, the gap between the schools within BHC sites and those outside has closed, suggesting a more significant move away from punishment and exclusion for those historically most pushed to the margins of society.

.....

Educators often discussed pressure from district central offices to not suspend students. However, without additional resources, declines in suspensions did not necessarily translate into more supportive or educative alternatives in these schools.

SCHOOLS PLOTTED ON THE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE QUADRANTS

We found a vast majority of schools to be clean, organized, and safe spaces for most students. Yet, in these schools, the primary purpose of discipline remained to ensure that students were in class, seated, and quiet without questioning authority. On the quadrants, this was demonstrated by a majority of schools falling below the X-axis.

We observed security guards hurrying students through hallways and to class. We shadowed students into classrooms where teachers taught lessons towards specific recognizable standards and spoke to students in firm but respectful ways. In a vast majority of classrooms, we found teachers who saw their role as preparing students primarily for jobs where they will have to listen and behave. One teacher provides an illustrative example of the most prevalent perspective held by teachers:

“I don’t send kids out. I try to handle as much as possible unless it’s like the kid walked out or it’s a situation where they directly curse at me. Then that has to be handled. Basically, what I do is just educate. I really let them know, ‘Okay. Respect has to go both ways. It cannot be, just because you’re a child, it’s not going to be okay for you to just curse at me and get away with it.’ There’s situations where kids ... just it didn’t work out. I made arrangements for them to switch classes. Especially ninth and 10th graders, they’re very emotional and it’s all about whether I like you or not. It’s like it’s not necessary. You’re going to have a boss you don’t like. There’s a lot of colleagues I work with I don’t like, but I still have to respect them and work with them, you know?”

Thus, within most classrooms we visited, instructional approaches emphasized rote learning of concepts that were not made relevant to students' lives or experiences. Student-to-student interactions around academic content were limited; substantive, critical engagement with each other's ideas and learning were even rarer. Teacher and student interactions were primarily one-way, directed by the teacher and students demonstrating content acquisition. While rote learning was more pronounced in rural schools, this 'banking method' of education continued to predominate in the classrooms we visited.

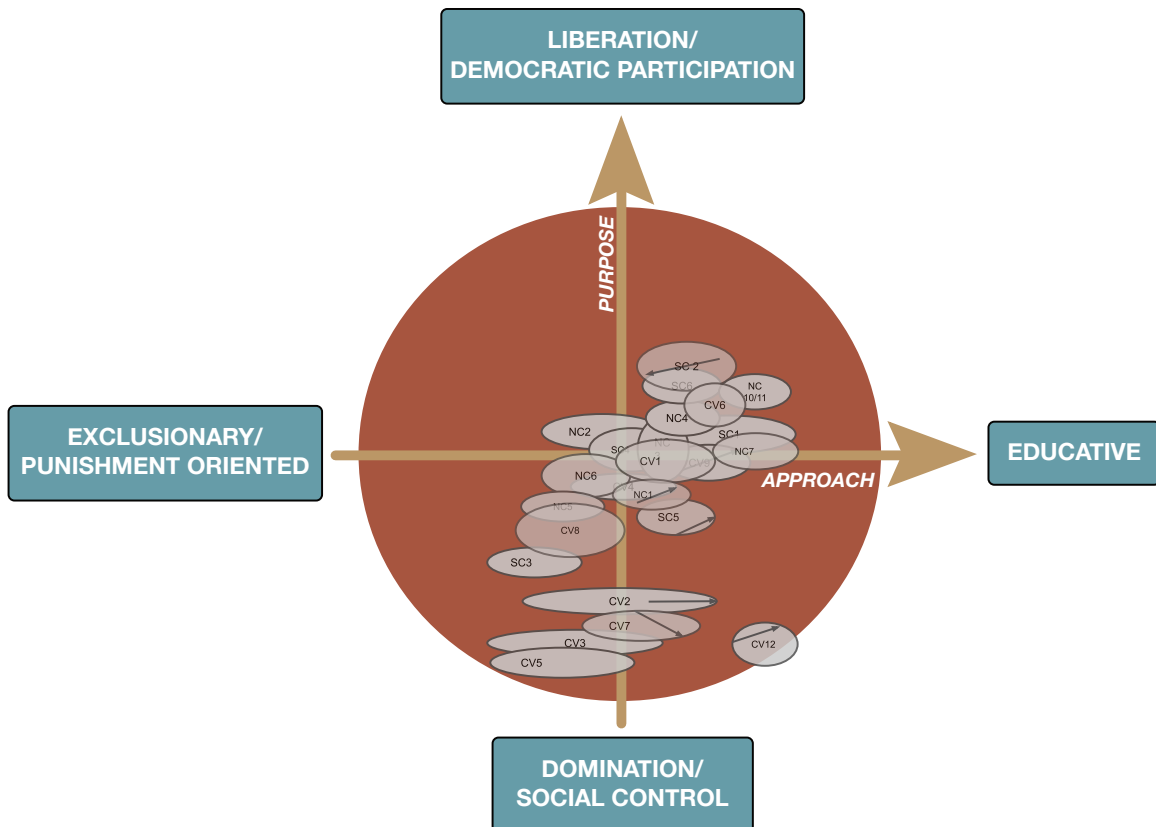
The most frequent misbehaviors occurred when students questioned the purpose of learning a particular standard, refused to do as they were told,

socialized with peers instead, or used their phones. We found that the recent school discipline reforms to reduce suspensions and implement alternatives like PBIS or RJ provided educators with more tools for addressing these behaviors with educative and non-punitive means but did not address the underlying tensions in the classroom.

To describe more fully the range of school climate, cultures, and disciplinary systems we observed in our sample of schools and to visualize the direction in which different strategies are shifting these cultures, we utilize the School Climate and Culture Quadrants that we described in more detail in the Research Methods (pp. 16 - 17).

Figure 7: Comprehensive Middle and High Schools Plotted on School Climate and Culture Quadrants

SCHOOLS PLOTTED BY EVERYDAY DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES



We found that regardless of TCE engagement, whether within BHC or outside, schools were widely distributed across the School Climate and Culture Quadrants. However, we plotted most schools in the bottom half of the Quadrants indicating that the purpose of discipline remains primarily for social control. As a result, in almost all locations, schools added alternative discipline practices onto existing exclusionary or punitive measures. Thus, schools continued to practice both punitive and educative disciplinary approaches. We describe these findings in more detail below.

BRIGHT SPOTS EXIST

Throughout the state and in almost every school, we observed particular bright spots or individual classrooms or interactions where instruction and alternative discipline approaches came together to create intrinsically educative academic experiences for young people for either democratic, participatory, or liberatory purposes. Unfortunately, these bright spots did not equate to whole-school disciplinary systems that supported all students.

For example, in one continuation school in a rural area, inspired by students' interests, the principal implemented an experiential learning program around a school farm that included livestock and a garden. In his mind, instruction and school culture are inextricably tied together:

"It's just trying to promote the culture here, being a restorative culture, a positive culture, we're all in this together, whatever-it-takes-type culture. And, more of a culture of 'Well, why not?' Not, 'No that can't happen.' You want to build a farm? Well, why couldn't we? Alright. We got folks that are Ag folks."

In this school, students who had been unsuccessful in comprehensive schools in the district built a farm and a ropes course, and created an entire day of experiential learning for elementary school classes in the district.

In another high school, educators created a ninth grade house in which ninth graders experienced a school-within-a-school where cohorts of students moved together. Ninth grade teachers collaborated on academic content and discipline practices, so students experienced coherence across subject matter and consistency in expectations across their classrooms. This school offered an exemplary model of weaving restorative justice practice with academic content. A teacher in the ninth grade house explains:

"We do an activity called Columbus on Trial. And the way that it was designed by Bill Bigelow from Rethinking Schools is the jury decides what to do with Columbus. And in the past, [students were] like kill Columbus, hang his men. But now we changed it to — we integrated RJ practices by asking the kids, 'Well how do they make things right now? You can't kill them, and you can't hang them.' So, the kids start asking for reparations. You need to make up all the harm that you've caused."

These examples of the creative weaving of intrinsically oriented and educative discipline practices with instruction provide examples of the kinds of education we could be offering in our state. We describe more examples of these bright spots in a separate brief available in the Appendix (pp. 92-98).

Yet, these bright spots were not the norm.

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While the underlying assumptions and values of alternative disciplinary approaches differ, what is common across Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative justice (RJ), and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is that they move discipline from a legal rule-following endeavor to a more educative one.

SCHOOLS WITHOUT AN ARTICULATED ALTERNATIVE DISCIPLINE APPROACH DEFAULTED TO PUNITIVE, EXCLUSIONARY, AND SOCIAL CONTROL ORIENTATIONS

Schools without school-articulated discipline approaches tended to be in the punitive and social control quadrant. In some of these schools, there was no plan because the school was essentially chaotic. Teachers lacked a sense of collective responsibility for the school. For example, one teacher says of their responsibility for monitoring school hallways,

“I think, ‘Okay I need to stay off that floor for a while,’ because I can’t pretend I don’t see behavior, and then it just makes for a horrible day.”

In schools that lacked a common school vision for school climate, culture, and discipline, teachers tended toward permissiveness or avoidance to make it through the day.

In these schools, academic busywork, such as copying notes, characterized most classrooms. In a sense, the teachers had given up on the school and retreated to their classrooms. In other schools, the district officially adopted an alternative discipline approach through top-down implementation mechanisms, so, teachers resisted and little evidence of any systematic alternative discipline practice was observed.

WIDESPREAD ADOPTION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO DISCIPLINE MOVE SOME SCHOOLS TOWARDS MORE EDUCATIVE MEANS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

While the underlying assumptions and values of alternative disciplinary approaches differ, what is common across Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative justice (RJ), and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is that they move discipline from a legal rule-following endeavor to a more educative one.³⁸ In schools where implementation strategies and conditions were supportive, we found evidence of more educative approaches to discipline. However, we also found that in many schools where implementation strategies and conditions were not supportive, the adoption of PBIS and RJ was only in name.

In the PBIS model, acceptable behaviors are described and taught in lessons at the start of school and reiterated throughout the year. Successful enactment of those good behaviors is rewarded, and unacceptable behaviors are corrected. While schools in our sample demonstrated different levels of success and institutionalization of these practices, most schools, at minimum, clearly articulated common school rules and expectations to students.

The RJ model uses conflict, misbehavior, and transgressions as moments for building empathy and understanding, and teaches individuals to recognize and repair the harms they have caused. These lessons occur through the facilitation of restorative justice circles in which participants take turns sharing their stories, experiences, and thoughts in response to prepared prompts, such as, “Who has helped you become who you are?”, “How were you impacted by what happened?”, “How did it make you feel?”, “What could you do to make it better?” Social and Emotional Learning teaches desirable traits and skills in curricular units, such as honesty, integrity, growth mindset, self-discipline, and empathy. Students are taught and then expected to practice these traits and skills. In each of these models, school discipline is treated as one element of student learning and development into adulthood. This common element provides new tools so that educators, given the motivation, skills, and time can replace punitive or exclusionary practices.

We found that when schools more fully practiced PBIS and RJ, their disciplinary practices were more educative. In one school practicing PBIS schoolwide, a teacher explains how expectations are taught explicitly during orientation and how teachers reiterate them in class.

“They’ll have orientations and they’ll have presentations ready and they’ll talk about uniforms, expectations, requirements, policies and sports. And just talk about the four major, we call them schoolwide rules, be safe, be respectful, be responsible, appreciate differences. And then I try to enforce that in the beginning of class, just to share examples and then that’s the major theme as a school. And then they do address it in staff meetings.”

In these schools, students are taught what it means to be safe and respectful in classrooms, hallways, and the library. In this way, school discipline is educative in nature.

Through interviews with administrators, teachers, and students, we found evidence that they ascribed positive changes to school climate and culture to the adoption of PBIS and RJ, usually with the biggest changes in school climate and culture occurring when in conjunction with smaller enrollments, small learning communities, and other structural changes. We discuss these findings more in the next section when we discuss the impact of adopting particular alternative approaches.

.....

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In many schools that officially adopted PBIS and/or RJ, lack of resources, organizational infrastructure, or underlying relational conflicts created obstacles for implementation and institutionalization (see section on Supportive Strategies & Remaining Obstacles). In these schools, the adoption of these alternative programs was often in name only, and we observed little evidence of these practices in classrooms. One exchange with a teacher in one of these schools illustrates this:

“[INTERVIEWER]: What’s your experience with restorative justice at this school?”

[TEACHER]: I know that we had a person doing restorative justice in the past, he was the person, the lead. I know that the Dean now uses it. I’ve never done it in my classroom. I’ve sent students out to a restorative justice circle. But I’ve never really, I’ve never done it.

[INTERVIEWER]: So, you weren’t trained in it or anything like that?

[TEACHER]: Were we trained? If we were, it was like a one-day thing. I don’t really remember it.

[INTERVIEWER]: Also, I know there’s PBIS, how do you—

[TEACHER]: What’s PBIS?

[INTERVIEWER]: The school wide, PBIS. Positive Behavior Intervention ...

[TEACHER]: Yeah, I don’t know what it is.

[INTERVIEWER]: Obviously, you don’t use it.

[TEACHER]: I don’t know what it is, in all honesty. I’ve heard that there’s a meeting on Thursdays. I think it’s tomorrow. I know there’s ... Well there’s three people that’ll show up. I don’t know, sometimes I think schools do things because the district mandates them but it’s not necessarily ... I don’t know what it is.”

PUNISHMENT & EXCLUSION CO-EXISTED WITH ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

In almost all of the focal schools in our comparative case study, alternative approaches such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Restorative Justice (RJ) were added on to existing punitive and exclusionary measures. Thus, we observed a range of discipline practices within each school, ranging from exclusion and punishment to educative. These practices often occurred side by side or in fact worked together. This range of approaches to discipline is denoted on the School Climate and Culture Quadrants by the oblong shapes.

Below we describe the persistence of punishment and exclusion in the form of school police involvement in school matters, removal of students to continuation schools, the maintenance of in-school suspension and detention rooms, and the creation of “walkers” and “roamers” — or students who habitually roam the halls — in schools without in-school suspension rooms.

SCHOOL POLICE ACCEPTED AS NECESSARY, DESPITE EVIDENCE OF LITTLE OR NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS

School police remain a constant presence in a majority of schools.³⁹ In 65% of the schools for which we had data, police were either stationed at school or police were readily available as backup to campus security officers. School police often parked their car in front of the school, had their own office on campus, and were described by administrators as important

administrative team members. Schools without school police tended to be small charter, private independent, or rural schools. Our data suggest that the presence of school police and security officers were normalized and insinuated as necessary, despite teachers and students having negative experiences of police presence in schools.

Our data suggest that administrators have normalized police presence on campus by framing them as community partners. In all but one school in our sample, school administrators described school police as such. For example, this excerpt from field notes of an observation of a ninth grade orientation assembly held during the second week of school:

“The Dean puts up a slide with his picture and a woman and a police officer. He says this is my team. He identifies the woman as working in his office and someone who can help. He also identifies the police officer by name and says, ‘He is the school police officer, some of you might recognize him from [local middle school].’ The Dean says these people are responsible for safety and security around campus. He says we are focused on education here.”

The police are normalized as part of the school and as members of a school administrator’s team. However, when we asked administrators to describe specific instances of police involvement, many described situations in which police involvement criminalized behaviors that might have been best dealt with on non-criminal grounds. For example, students sending sexual selfies were treated as child pornography cases. In another case, a student who fell through an awning while climbing on a school building to retrieve a ball was in trouble for trespassing and destruction of property.

We found evidence that despite little evidence that school police did much more than park their police cars in the front of the school, shake hands with students, and come when called by administrators for student behaviors that cross over into law-breaking, school-police partnerships were strengthening, particularly in the Central Valley. In the Central Valley, school administrators discussed school-police grants for restorative justice, active-shooter training, police drug-sniffing dogs, and space-sharing agreements.⁴⁰ In many schools in the Central Valley, administrators also discussed adding more fences and security cameras.

Moreover, we found that a RJ model derived from a victim-offender reconciliation program connected RJ to the criminal justice system in the Central Valley region. Data also suggest that this model of RJ at times involved the RJ coordinator to utilize their relationship with students for law enforcement home visits.

Federal Community Oriented Policing (COPS) grant funding has encouraged the expansion of school-police partnerships nationally, providing between \$98 million and \$400 million a year to hire officers during the time of this study.⁴¹ These grants included explicit preferences for school-based policing, increasing the police force in rural communities, and requiring that applicants work with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

For teachers, police presence offered a vague sense of deterrence even though they generally reported minimal interactions with school police.

“I don’t know why [the police office] is here ... not to go ahead and actually step in and work as another hallway monitor or another admin or anything like that. To my knowledge and based on what I’ve seen, it’s more of just kind of keeping it safe. You know, I fully believe that if he saw

any weapon of any type that he would intervene, but I think that’s really what it comes down to.”

When they did report direct interactions, teachers often linked police to student removal from the classroom, and with the use of aggressive tactics such as handcuffs and physical force to break up fights.

“So, at the very beginning of the school year there was a really bad fight in my classroom and so the officer came in and handcuffed a student, which was kind of intense. You can only say, ‘please don’t do that’ so many times to somebody. So, I think for me, I’m still trying to understand and I want to appreciate that their job is difficult and intricate but for me it was such a ... I can’t have that in my classroom, so I’m not totally sure what their job was. I do know that in order to break up fights sometimes you need two adults to hold kids back, but I think that was such an abrasive, unnecessary level of what is needed.”

Thus, the data suggest that when asked about their first-hand experiences with school police, a majority of teachers reported only interactions limited to the kind of cursory, professional civility extended to any colleague at the school site. However, those teachers that had more direct interactions with school police almost always described incidents that involved physical force and often an escalation of conflict.

While administrators and teachers referred to a vague notion of safety as a key justification for having school police on campuses, students experienced police as conspicuously absent when students’ safety was threatened. A student, who was open to the idea of police at her school, observes how police are too busy to be concerned with “small things,” such as a student being attacked:

In another school, several Latinx students described their fear of the neighborhood around the school. They explain that they thought twice about joining after-school extracurricular activities because they did not want to walk home at night. Even though police had an office at the school site, they did not safeguard students in the walk to and from school. Instead, these same students felt threatened by their school police:

“I feel like if they were to come up to students, just the way they portray themselves, it’s going to feel like we’re already being attacked, like they’re trying to come for us just because they’re talking to us.”

A student in another school shared that the school police officer stopped him on his way to school one day because he was mistaken for someone who had just committed a crime. Thus, the presence of school police led to this student being targeted and racially profiled

When students had direct interaction with police, they almost always described police involvement escalating to force.

“Some of the school police are cool, but it was an incident that happened last year. One of the girls was pregnant. They didn’t know the girl was pregnant, mind you, but it was a mediation, and they ended up fighting inside the art room. The school police came in, and I guess she felt like she kept antagonizing her because she kept talking back and forth to her. She was just like, ‘Be quiet. Be quiet.’ Then, she started settling down, but the girl who was pregnant was the one who got pinned up to the wall, like pushed hard against the wall. She was like, ‘I’m not doing anything.’ The other girl was trying to attack her. He wasn’t really worried about the girl that was trying to get to her. It was embarrassing, though, because it was a whole bunch of students in that hallway. Then, she got pushed hard like super hard. Her face hit the wall.”

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In another school, several students described their fear of the neighborhood around the school. They explain that they thought twice about joining after-school extracurricular activities because they did not want to walk home at night. Even though police had an office at the school site, they did not safeguard students in the walk to and from school. Instead, these same students felt threatened by their school police.

In this incident, a fight in a classroom resulted in a police officer pushing a student hard up against the wall. The student describes the officer hitting the pregnant girl's face against the wall, even after she had already calmed down. The student also notes the pregnant girl's safety was most at risk, but the police failed to secure her safety and used excessive force against her.

In another incident, students explained they didn't see the school police officer much, but once witnessed police using pepper spray to break up a fight.

"[INTERVIEWEE 1]: That one time where they pepper-sprayed, that was one of them.

[INTERVIEWEE 5]: Well, they tried to pepper-spray, but they ended up pepper-spraying a whole group and themselves.

[INTERVIEWEE 3]: Yeah, because the kids wouldn't stop.

[INTERVIEWER]: You don't see police that often? Does having police on campus make you feel safe, unsafe?

[INTERVIEWEE 1]: Yeah, at some point.

[INTERVIEWEE 2]: It's like a mixture of it.

[INTERVIEWEE 2]: You feel safe, but then it's like, it's to the point where you feel like you're being held in a prison or something, because we have people who are armed, and there's a potentiality of you being harmed because of someone else's fault, or them pulling out their weapons because something else is going to happen. You're just going to be a bystander, like the pepper spray ... The group of people, most of them were just bystanders during the situation."

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Our data reveal that police were often absent during times when students felt threatened and that most teachers' and students' direct interactions with police involved the removal or physical control of students, often forcibly and aggressively.

Students in this focus group shared that they feel mixed about whether school police make them feel more or less safe but note the danger that police pose to bystanders.

Our data reveal that police were often absent during times when students felt threatened and that most teachers' and students' direct interactions with police involved the removal or physical control of students, often forcibly and aggressively. We also noted more incidents of escalating violence in schools serving some Black or Indigenous students. In at least two schools, this resulted in the removal and replacement of the school police officer. Black students in our focus group sample expressed more instances of being profiled and witnessing these experiences. This suggests that police are most often used against students, particularly Black and Indigenous students, in schools.

REMOVAL OF STUDENTS TO A COMPLEX SYSTEM OF CONTINUATION SCHOOLS

While our data on continuation schools was not as systematic as we would have liked, covering mostly continuation schools in the Central Valley and one in a rural Northern California district, it suggests that students continue to be removed to a complex system of continuation schools and other alternative education facilities.⁴² School enrollment data show that continuation schools across our sample

disproportionately enroll Black and Indigenous students, and students describe this trend as well.

Students speak troublingly of the role continuation schools play in exclusionary practices. The following excerpt is from a focus group with members of the Black Student Union who attended a predominantly Latinx school in Southern California. Students call out the anti-Black school environment and identify the continuation school as a mechanism to continue to remove and exclude Black students:

“I say about two years ago, it was a fight between Blacks and Latinos, a big rumble ... Then, when the fight ended, everybody tried to blame it on us like, ‘Oh, they’re the one who started the fight.’

They tried to kick everybody off, because we was all part of the sports team. They tried to kick all of us off, but they let the Latinos stay where they are. Half of them was the soccer team. I ain’t going to lie, the soccer team is good. They would go to the championship every year. They didn’t want to take them off the team. Then, we were like, ‘How come we got to see this punishment not the same as them?’ They tried to kick us all out. They kicked like half the Black kids out. That’s why you never see Black kids here. It’s 9% Black kids that go here and 91% Latinos.”

.....
Students speak troublingly of the role continuation schools play in exclusionary practices.

.....
Students call out the anti-Black school environment and identify the continuation school as a mechanism to continue to remove and exclude Black students:.

In addition to the school using removal to continuation schools to respond in a discriminatory manner to ‘safety’ issues like fights, the school also encouraged Black students to voluntarily re-assign themselves to continuation schools for alleged academic reasons.

“[STUDENT 1]: They say, ‘Oh, let’s take you to [continuation school]. You can get done with school faster.’

[STUDENT 2]: Yeah. I feel like they underestimate our intelligence because I ain’t going to lie. I messed up. When I first came to [high school], my grades wasn’t up to date, and they tried to send me to a different school, and I’m like, ‘No, I got this.’ ... My counselor even told me, ‘Well, we can still send you to [continuation school].’ I don’t want to go to [continuation school] because that goes to show you like, ‘Oh, you all won the battle.’ I just want to prove a point to you all. Black kids is here. We’re intelligent students.

[STUDENT 3]: It’s basically like they don’t want to deal with us at this school.”

School counselors and administrators created a climate of exclusion for Black students through unequal punishment and targeting for removal to continuation school.

In the Central Valley, we found that schools actively removed students to a complex system of alternative education facilities regardless of TCE involvement or alternative discipline approach adopted. Reasons for removing students to continuation schools included improving graduation rates, removing special education students who were disruptive in class, and removing students considered to be gang members. The mission of one district's continuation school found on their website stated an unusually candid explanation of their mission:

“The mission of our school is to address the needs of the specific student population who chronically experience attendance and discipline problems as well as lower achievement levels. The existence of this school site additionally provides a valuable service to other school settings by eliminating the students who would potentially raise the suspension and truancy rates.”

In many districts, these facilities acted as locations to warehouse students deemed in-educatable in increasingly prison-like conditions. These facilities, particularly in the Central Valley, were often heavily gated with little or no green space, and classroom activities involved completing packets with little or no group instruction or socializing. In our study, we also found continuation schools that provided more holistic educational experiences to their students, suggesting that the purpose of continuation schools — whether to punish, scare and return, seclude, or provide alternative educational experiences — is very much contested in the state.

USE OF IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION AND DETENTION ROOMS

In many of the focal schools in our sample, administrators maintain in-school suspension and detention rooms. One teacher explains:

“Because schools get dinged for suspensions. They get dinged for expulsions. You know what? Kids may end up going to the Dean’s office and the kid basically gets warehoused for a period. Yeah. A lot of kids like that stuff. Because you can’t really do the work that’s in class.”

We found this practice was driven by the contradictions that arose when policy and district accountability pressures required schools to reduce suspensions, teachers demanded support for classroom discipline, and alternatives were experienced as either unavailable or ineffective.

Conversations with students supported findings regarding in-school suspension and detention rooms. Students shared a great deal about these rooms and understood them to be central to the discipline system at their schools, even when administrators we interviewed avoided speaking about them. In several schools, students explained that students enjoyed being sent out to these rooms and even built identities revolving around being ‘Room [X]’ students. One student explains,

“Sometimes even those kids think SRC [Student Resource Center] gets fun because they don’t have to do anything. It’s like, ‘Oh, let’s go to SRC.’ I’ve heard kids say that ... I hear kids sometimes say, ‘I’d rather go to SRC than be at school!’”

Most school administrators described they were revamping in-house suspension or detention into more restorative spaces. Instead of having a room to simply house students when out of class, the goal was to have space for students to think through how to address conflict. These rooms were typically staffed with adults on campus, whether they were a campus security officer, teacher, or RJ staff member, well-known for their ability to connect with students.

However, in reality, when we observed these rooms, we found these spaces were more restorative in intent than in practice. In one room, students came in, filled out reflection sheets, and were expected to remain quiet for the remainder of the period. Students often put their heads down, slept, or chatted with others in the room.

In one high school, the kind of room that students were sent to depended on the time of day. For two periods a day, the room was staffed by a teacher who had significant restorative justice experience and trained a group of student mentors for peer conflict mediation. The room operated as traditional in-house suspension during other periods of the day. The school was unable to dedicate funds for a full-time adult who had the skills to create a restorative space for students throughout the entire school day. Additionally, students could not decide for themselves to go to the room. Instead, teachers sent students to the room when they could not resolve an issue in the classroom.

The data suggest that suspension and detention rooms persist in part because they continue to meet the needs of the institution without requiring deeper changes. When students are fed up with classes or particular teachers, they have an escape valve, teachers can remove students from their classes, and administrators have a place to hold students and make their teachers happy without much interference with their daily work.

“WALKERS” AND “ROAMERS” IN SCHOOLS WITHOUT IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION AND DETENTION ROOMS

Several of our focal schools, especially large comprehensive schools that appeared to provide safe and welcoming school environments for most students, struggled with what they called “walkers” and “roamers.” Despite active security guards and hall monitoring, groups of students were seen regularly roaming the hallways. A concerned teacher explains:

“I think the discipline policy schoolwide [that our high school] is struggling with is — I don’t know if you noticed all the walkers. That’s one thing that does bother me because I see some of my students. Not some, a few, very few of my students, constantly walking. I’m like, ‘Why? Why are you still walking the hallways? Do people not notice you?’ Like what are they doing because ... I call home a lot, and I wonder when security finds them or the assistant principal, are they

just like ‘Okay go to your classroom now.’ Or is someone really calling home and having a meeting with those parents because they need assistance. The kids need some guidance. So that’s a constant something that we would like to fix.”

The data suggest that the walking and roaming phenomena in these schools is similar to in-school suspension and detention rooms. Teachers allowed students whom they deemed disruptive or disengaged to walk out of class, and students who disliked particular teachers or who felt disengaged in particular classes to roam the halls instead of attending class. Administrators expressed frustration but largely tolerated it.

While not a form of punishment or explicit exclusion, we found that these phenomena evidenced how school classrooms are continuing to fail to engage all students. And now, school disciplinary systems that attempt to punish students into behaving in class are seen to be failing too. This and other findings point to the need to rethink the core of schooling — curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom culture.

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The data suggest that the walking and roaming phenomena in these schools is similar to in-school suspension and detention rooms.

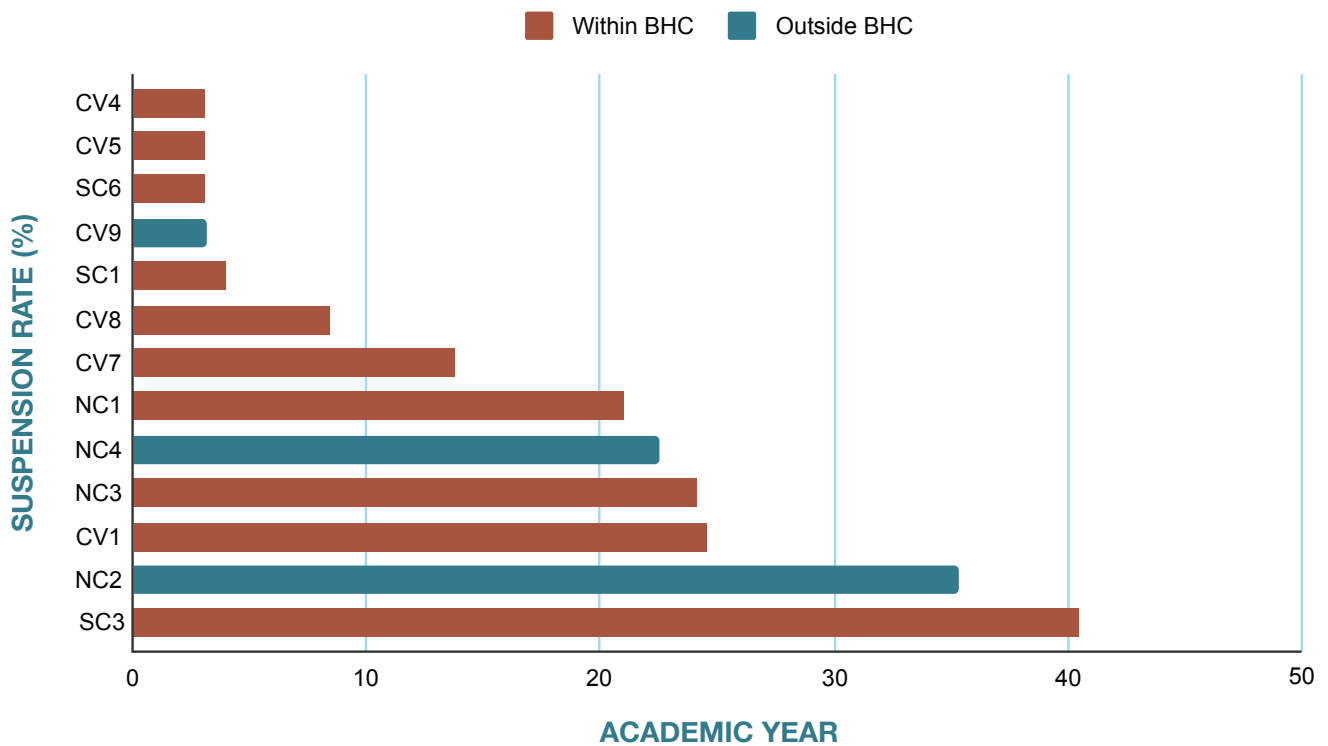
RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY PERSISTED

As school policing, exclusion to continuation schools, the persistence of in-school suspension rooms, and student disengagement from the classroom were present in a majority of the focal schools in our sample, we found that particular students were disproportionately subject to these forms of punishment and exclusion, along with a continued disproportionality in suspensions. We found this to be true for Black students, Indigenous students, and Latinx students who were deemed to be gang involved.

Consistent with findings of multiple reports,⁴³ Black students continue to be disproportionately suspended (see Figure 8 and 9). Figure 8 displays the difference between suspension rates and enrollment rates for Black students within a subsample of 18 schools that enrolled at least 10% Black students. Over time, the positive difference demonstrates that all schools, regardless of TCE involvement, suspended Black students at rates higher than their enrollment. About half the schools in this subsample had an average difference of less than five percent and two had a difference of less than 10 percent, leaving nearly half the schools in this sample with at least a 10-point difference between rates of suspension and rates of enrollment for Black students.

Figure 8: Disproportionate Suspension of Black Students: Average Difference Between the % of Black Students Suspended and the % of Black Students Enrolled

DISPROPORTIONATE SUSPENSION OF BLACK STUDENTS

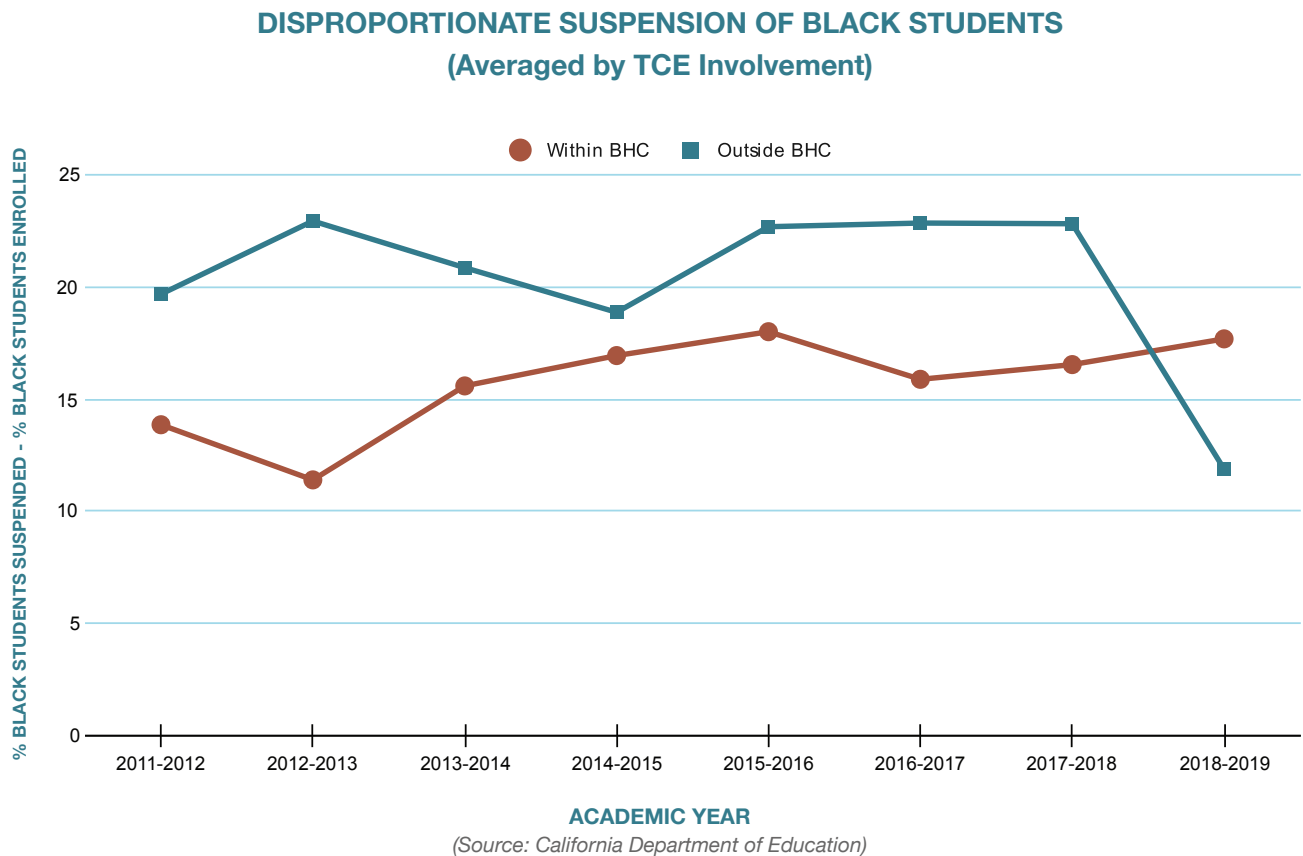


(Source: California Department of Education)

Figure 9 demonstrates the difference between suspension and enrollment rates for Black students, grouped by schools within and outside BHC sites. These data points demonstrate that in 2011, schools within BHC sites suspended Black students at an average rate that was 14 points higher than their population. In comparison, schools outside of BHC sites suspended Black students at rates that were nearly 20 points higher than their numbers in the overall student population.

Between 2011–2019, the disproportionate suspension of Black students has increased on average for our focal schools within a BHC site. In contrast, the average disproportionality among the three schools outside of BHC sites, for which there is meaningful data, show a precipitous drop in AY 2018-19; this subsample only includes three schools which makes the average for this group sensitive to change in any one of the three schools.

Figure 9: Disproportionate Suspension of Black Students: Average Difference Between the % of Black Students Suspended and the % of Black Students Enrolled, Grouped by TCE Involvement



We found that none of the strategies adopted by schools explicitly addressed what researchers have identified as anti-Blackness and what our data suggest also extends to anti-indigeneity or the continuation of settler colonialism in America. Anti-Blackness, as it is applied to education, is the pattern of systematic practice of educational policies (i.e., zero-tolerance school discipline, attendance zones, tracking, choice programs, testing, barriers to access to Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes, etc.) layered upon social policies (i.e., redlining, racial covenants, three-strikes laws, gang injunctions) that perpetuate dramatically different life outcomes for Black children and youth.⁴⁴ Feeding and fed by discriminatory policies and practices are a host of beliefs, assumptions, and apathies held by school communities to justify and normalize these racially disparate outcomes.

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We found that the mechanisms of anti-Blackness and other forms of disposability of particular students were different in different schools but followed a noticeable pattern based on the racial composition. Schools enrolling a sizable number of Black students or (more than 18% in our sample), were often located in neighborhoods experiencing deep disinvestment. These schools were also often where Newcomer programs for recent immigrants, mostly from Mexico and Latin America, were located. This larger geographical context meant proximity to industrial sites with bad air quality, frequent instances of violence in surrounding areas, increased policing, and busy thoroughfares, which created danger for students traveling to and from school. In fact, researchers arrived at one school to interview the principal only to learn that a student was hit by a train earlier that morning when they were walking to school along one of the many crisscrossing train tracks in the neighborhood.

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MECHANISMS OF ANTI-BLACKNESS IN HISTORICALLY “BLACK” SCHOOLS

The three focal schools in our sample serving a sizable number of Black families in schools located in historically disinvested Black neighborhoods were also schools where Newcomer Programs, or programs geared toward students who have recently immigrated, were located. These schools faced limited district resources, repeated discussions of school closure, and severe staffing instability, in contrast to schools in the same district less than 5 or 10 miles away. As in many urban districts in our study, three school districts to which these schools belonged faced double-digit million-dollar deficits during the time of the study. For these three focal schools, this translated into the threat of layoffs for all pre-tenure teachers and some more senior teachers in the middle of the year, the reduction of administrative positions, and the cutting of student support programs year after year. Teacher turnover in these schools was regularly higher than state and district averages.

Pressed between young people’s disaffection with school in a community forgotten and disinvested, a widening gap between curricular demands and student achievement, and teachers’ job insecurity, we observed classrooms to be largely holding spaces where students and teachers worked out tacit agreements to make it through the day. In some classrooms, this meant teachers allowing some students to watch videos on their phones while they taught a smaller group at the front of the room. In other classrooms, we observed a substitute teacher kindly suggesting students copy another student’s paper, so they had something to turn in. This is not to say that we did not find counterexamples. In several

rare cases, we observed teachers, often five to 10 years in the profession, who led instructive lessons where students demonstrated their method of solving a math problem, provided peer feedback on an essay, and worked on an ecosystem model.

We also found that the on-campus supports for students were primarily grant-funded within these schools, which stood out in contrast to many of the Central Valley schools in our study that paid a significant number of support staff through core budgets. The grant-funded out-of-classroom personnel in these schools had strong relationships with students and provided counseling, extracurricular supports, mediation, and restorative justice. While these services often provided safe and welcoming spaces on campus and positive adult connections, particularly with staff members from the community, many services were not integrated into either the teaching and learning or the school disciplinary systems, leaving the core of schooling untouched. Grant-funded positions also created additional demands on administrators to coordinate, supervise, evaluate, and report on services. The low pay and low job security in these positions also translated into high turnover rates.

In two of the three schools, we observed one or more fights during our three days of observation. These fights were physically broken up by teachers or administrators, often with police standing by. Young people and adults were physically injured in some of these fights. One administrator explained that it’s caused mainly by ‘girl drama,’ which they explained was tied to girls wanting to protect their reputation, and be seen and significant. Researchers observed that unlike many other comprehensive high schools in our sample, this school had very few clubs or activities to support student development or leadership.

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These findings suggest that for schools enrolling a sizable number of Black students, the underlying sources of anti-Blackness in these schools were not primarily related to the punishment and exclusion of young people from learning opportunities. Instead, evidence points more to larger state-wide policies like Proposition 13 or to local district policies like Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), attendance zones, teacher support, and principal hiring and firing decisions.

Despite these challenging conditions, school administrators in these schools, predominantly Black administrators, faced tremendous pressure from the school district to show improved college and career readiness, low suspension numbers, and higher test scores. Often given just one or two years to show improvement, many school leaders were removed by the school district or moved on, leading to evidence of leadership turnover every several years in two of the three schools. Furthermore, evidence suggests that district-drawn attendance zones and district-permitted charter schools shaped a pattern of concentration of Black students in these schools. For example, in interviews with students in one school, students described that they were enrolled in this school because their parents had not enrolled them in a charter school, and when asked the name of the charter school, students guessed, “the Latino School?”

These patterns that affected schools enrolling a sizable Black student body and the failure of school district central offices to address the inequalities or refrain from exacerbating them are examples of

anti-Blackness in education. We found that while these patterns created significant barriers to any coordinated improvement efforts, a vast majority of teachers, administrators, security, and support staff in these schools treated students with kindness and practiced little to no punishment or exclusion.

These findings suggest that for schools enrolling a sizable number of Black students, the underlying sources of anti-Blackness in these schools were not primarily related to the punishment and exclusion of young people from learning opportunities. Instead, evidence points more to larger state-wide policies like Proposition 13 or to local district policies like Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), attendance zones, teacher support, and principal hiring and firing decisions. For example, Proposition 13 severely limits property tax revenue, leading to resource scarcity within California schools. Yet, the industries that benefit from Proposition 13 are located in close proximity to the schools serving larger percentages of Black and Newcomer students, creating negative externalities like pollution and train dangers, particularly for these communities.

MECHANISMS OF ANTI-BLACKNESS IN HISTORICALLY NON-BLACK SCHOOLS WITH A SMALL BLACK POPULATION

In contrast to our above findings, we found a different pattern of anti-Blackness in other schools enrolling Black students in our sample. In one comprehensive suburban school that enrolled a student body comprised approximately of 20% Black students and in three other comprehensive schools enrolling student bodies hovering around 10% Black students,⁴⁵ we found relatively positive school climates for a majority of students, but evidence of disproportionate punishment and exclusion for Black students. In these schools, students and staff described, and we observed, multiple instances of interpersonal racism and exclusion. This pattern held true in every region of the state. In one Southern California school, Black students were disproportionately removed to continuation schools, convinced to voluntarily transfer to continuation schools, and more harshly policed by school police. We described these findings in more detail above. A Black peer mediator in this school shared with researchers that administrators called her in to help mediate when Black students were in trouble and that when she was not involved, students were often arrested and suspended.

Black students and Black staff acknowledged that these schools did not celebrate Black culture like other cultural heritages within the school.

Students explain:

“When we did our BSU [Black Student Union] activities last year at the quad, we ain’t see nothing but Black kids around there. We didn’t have the type of support as they do with Latinos ... [For Día de los Muertos]. When you do that, you see posters getting put up, people decorating doors. You’ve got skulls here, skulls there. When you’re in the choir, you got people dancing, you got food out there. They didn’t have none of that for us.”

Students in these schools felt that they did not belong and were not wanted. They spoke about persisting so that the school would not succeed in getting rid of them.

In another large comprehensive school in Northern California, where groups of faculty came together to discuss racism and how to combat it in their school, the research team observed that a significant number of “roamers” were Black students, and several teachers described these students as belonging to a neighboring city and not truly belonging to their school. Student focus groups and observations across the Central Valley suggest that in schools enrolling some Black students (~ 10 percent), Black students, especially Black girls, were disciplined unfairly, subject to dress and behavior codes more often, and sent out of class.

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Student focus groups and observations across the Central Valley suggest that in schools enrolling some Black students (~ 10 percent), Black students, especially Black girls, were disciplined unfairly, subject to dress and behavior codes more often, and sent out of class.

MECHANISMS OF ANTI-INDIGENEITY

We found that similar patterns seemed to hold for a school district in our sample that served a sizable Indigenous population. In this district, bordering an American Indian Reservation, anti-Indigeneity in schools layered upon a history of anti-Indigenous practices and policies, beginning with the massacre and death by disease of over 75% of the local tribes, the theft and settlement of their lands, the violent suppression of armed resistance, and the confinement of the Tribe to the Reservation. Present-day educational practices and outcomes for Indigenous students must be understood against the history of American schooling for this community.⁴⁶ Formal education policy and practice for Indigenous students in this region began as the mandated instruction in English and the punishment of students for the use of their Indigenous language or cultural traditions. Then, at the turn of the 20th century, the Bureau of Indian Education removed Indigenous children from this region to boarding schools hundreds of miles away, with the explicit goal of Americanization.

Our study found that similar to schools in historically Black neighborhoods, the middle school in our focal district located on the Reservation was under-resourced and unable to address the years of dispossession and disinvestment of the surrounding community. A previous administrator at the school remembers taking the job as a new administrator and having the electric generator stolen multiple times.

Before our study, the district closed the middle school on the Reservation, reassigning students to a middle school in the nearby city, which would require a lengthy bus ride of up to 90 minutes each way. In this middle school, we found leadership turnover, difficulty retaining teachers, a range of classroom practices, and a relatively disheartened staff. We found some evidence of deficit-oriented characterization of Indigenous students used to explain not engaging with them.

Furthermore, teachers and principals in this district acknowledged a common practice of new teachers and new administrators earning their stripes in the schools serving more Indigenous students, and moving to more affluent and whiter schools, creating instability. In these ways, personal choices alongside district-accepted practice created patterns that disproportionately harmed Indigenous students.

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MECHANISMS OF DISPOSABILITY IN LATINX COMMUNITIES

Many public schools in California predominantly serve Latinx students. We found that in these schools, perceived gang involvement was the major justification for punishment and exclusion. A common theme in several schools in the Central Valley was that in previous years, the school was like the “Wild Wild West,” and school courtyards resembled prison yards. An administrator describes:

“You had your groups of kids ... so-called wanna-be gang members. You had your three different groups on campus, and it was just about being like in a prison yard. You monitor the groups, and we’re on the radios. We got two, three kids moving this way, two, three kids moving that way. It was always a tension in the air. If I may, I think when PBIS came on board, that started the whole change.”

Local gang injunctions that deemed clothing and conduct a public nuisance exacerbated these concerns and led to administrators preventing Latinx students from playing together. One student explains:

“Like on the basketball court, there’s kids that have Latino friends. And they’re just in a group talking, and [security] come, and they’re like, ‘Oh, you guys have to split up. You guys can’t be together.’ I don’t know, it’s not fair that they can’t be with their friends like that.”

Gang injunctions, and many of the school-based practices that mimicked them, tended to criminalize dress and basic behaviors, regardless of whether students were in fact gang-affiliated. Administrators frequently threw in “wanna-be’s” along with true gang-members as being rightfully subject to punishment and exclusion.

We saw very little evidence of gang activity in the schools we visited. When describing one of the recent “big ones” of gang-related expulsions, a middle school administrator explains that the school recently expelled four students for recording a “diss track” about a fifth grader and posting it on YouTube. The administrator explains that on the “diss track” the group of four middle schoolers wrapped themselves up in red crepe paper, waved around fake guns and fake money, and used profanity. In one line, they used the name of a teacher. While the students explain that they used the teacher’s name only because they could not figure out another word that rhymed, they were expelled for using the teacher’s name and gang references, which school administrators extrapolated from the color of the crepe paper and the guns.

Even in schools that adopted restorative justice (RJ), adults frequently explained that RJ was inappropriate for addressing gang issues. For example, an educator speaking about the limits of RJ for gang-involved young people shares:

“My idea of RJ is to reintegrate the student or the teacher back into the situation. But once we’ve deemed that a student has made a situation unsafe, I don’t think it’s appropriate to try to repair relationships and bring them back into the campus. And so, I think it’s a safety issue at that point.”

The adults, mostly educators, who discussed “gangs” in the region appeared to evoke the idea to describe a conversation-ending external threat — the explanation for removal or exclusion that required no additional explanation. However, there was little examination or exploration of the roots of community violence or the conditions that spur gang affiliation in the region. We also found little recognition of the role that prison and immigration policies, migration patterns, personal loss and trauma, and young people’s yearning for belonging and purpose play.⁴⁷ Instead, we found that the gang imagery evoked by many adults in the region justified punishment, policing, and exclusion. ◆

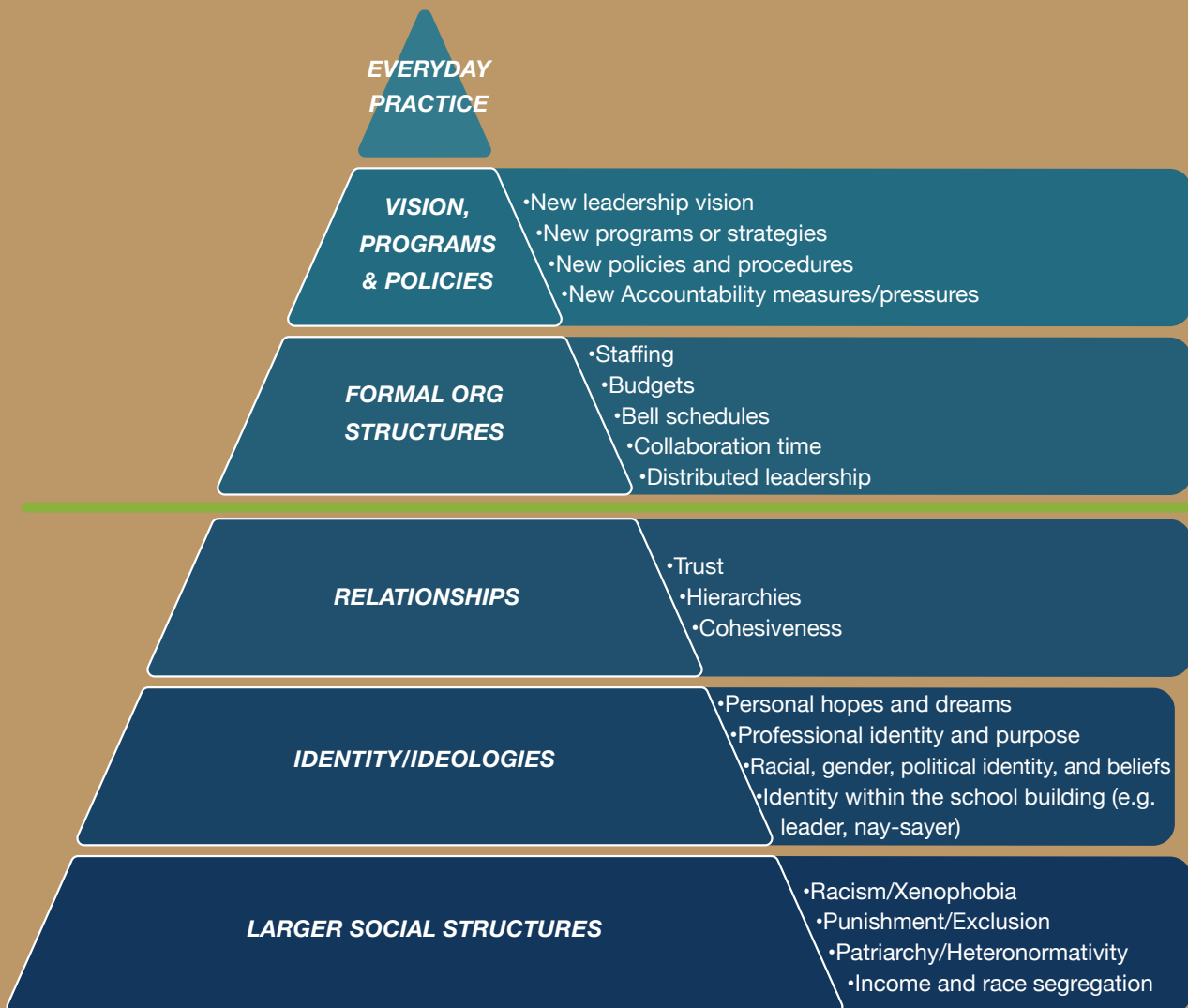
SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES & REMAINING OBSTACLES

What strategies and conditions have supported efforts to move away from punitive or exclusionary school discipline practices? What obstacles remain?

We adapted the Margaret Wheatley Six-Circle Model⁴⁸ to organize our findings related to the institutional supports and obstacles to changing everyday practice. Our adaptation of Wheatley’s model suggests that

everyday disciplinary practices are only the tip of a large iceberg. It is what we see when we enter a school. However, these everyday practices are undergirded by formal (above the green line) and informal (below the green line) aspects of organizations.

Figure 10: The Institutional Supports and Obstacles to Changing Everyday Practice (Adapted from Margaret Wheatley)



When educators are asked to shift everyday practice, the ways that the base of the iceberg supports or constrains new practices often determine the sustainability of those changes. For example, everyday disciplinary practices are enabled or constrained by a particular school mission and vision put forth by school leaders, disciplinary approaches adopted such as PBIS or RJ, and formal district and individual school discipline policies.

Beneath those explicit expressions of what school discipline should be at this school are the formal organizational structures that may or may not match the expressed vision, program, and policies and can either support or create obstacles for discipline practices. Formal organizational structures include what staff positions exist and their job descriptions; the presence, structure, and goals for collaboration time; the structure of leadership teams; the process for creation of and the content of budgets; and how school days are organized for students.

Above the green line are the categories of ‘what we do’ in school — the practices, programs, policies, and structures that standardize the work of teaching and learning. Because these components are easily identified in the school’s daily life, they are often most accessible and apparent as targets of reform and change.

Below the green line are informal aspects of the organization — the aspects of the organization that are less visible to an outsider but shapes ‘how we do’ our jobs and how individuals and organizations respond to new programs, ideas, and approaches.

Below the green line are relationships between administrators and teachers, between teachers and student support staff, and between teachers. Whether cohesiveness, collaboration, and trust or hierarchy, competition, and distrust characterize adult relationships determines how educators are motivated and able (or not) to build understanding and skills to shift practice. Similarly, the deep-seated beliefs of a community or the conflicts between different community members that hold different deep-seated beliefs matter for the kinds of disciplinary practices they utilize, sometimes regardless of the relationships or organizational structures and processes available to shift approach. Finally, the larger social context in which a school is embedded often shapes everything else. The social and political context often shapes the identity and ideologies of those who work within a school or attend a school, in addition to the relationships between individuals. Similarly, the political and economic context often determines the organizational structures and policies possible.

We examine the institutional supports and obstacles to moving away from punitive and exclusionary school discipline on the following page.

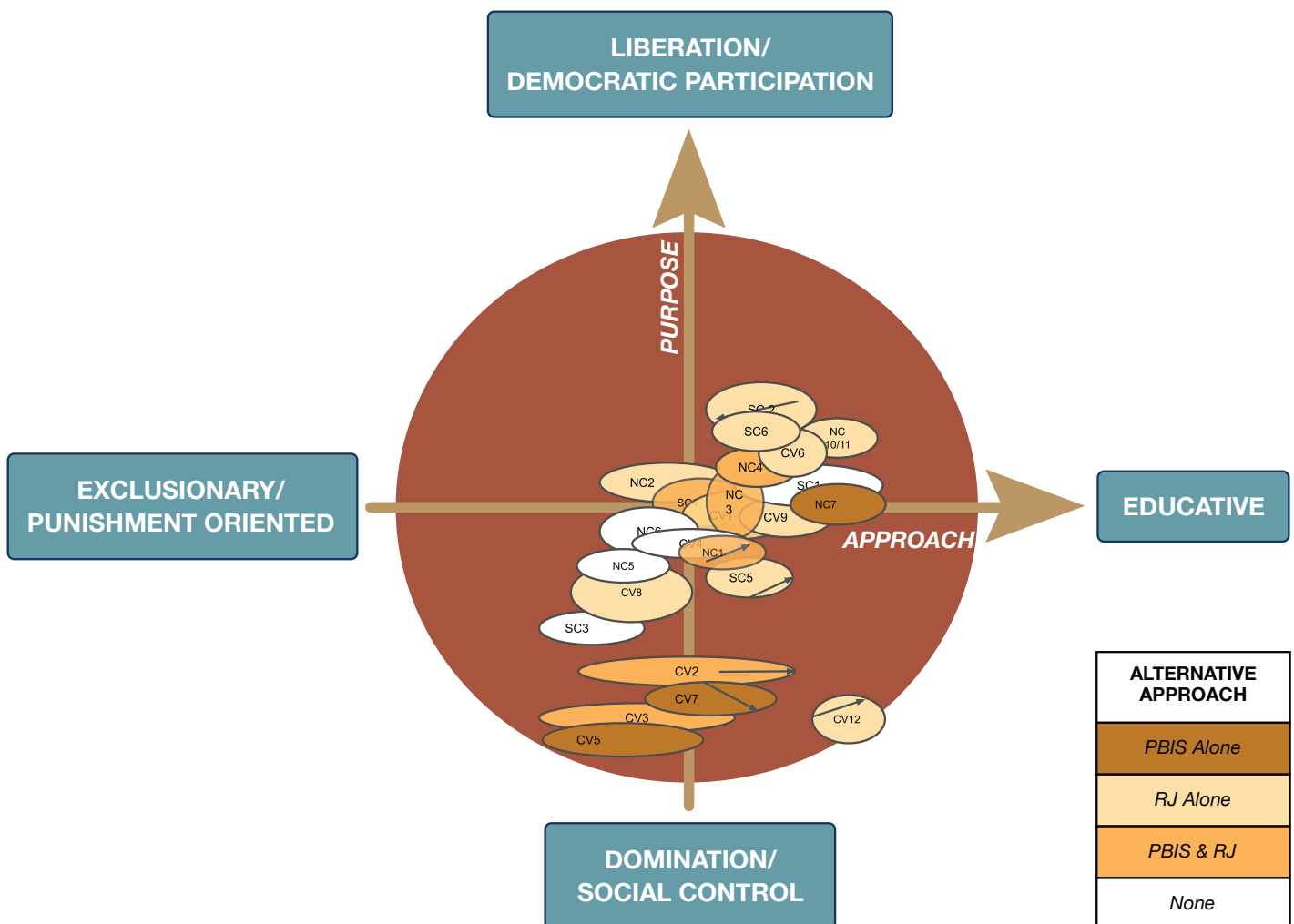
The social and political context often shapes the identity and ideologies of those who work within a school or attend a school, in addition to the relationships between individuals. Similarly, the political and economic context often determines the organizational structures and policies possible.

PROGRAM AND APPROACH ADOPTION

Our study finds evidence that most schools adopted some form of alternative discipline approach, including Restorative Justice, Restorative Practices, School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), or Character Education. Schools had very different levels of success with implementation, and at the time of our school visits, we observed practices at very different stages of institutionalization.

Figure 11: Comprehensive Middle and High Schools Plotted on School Climate and Culture Quadrants

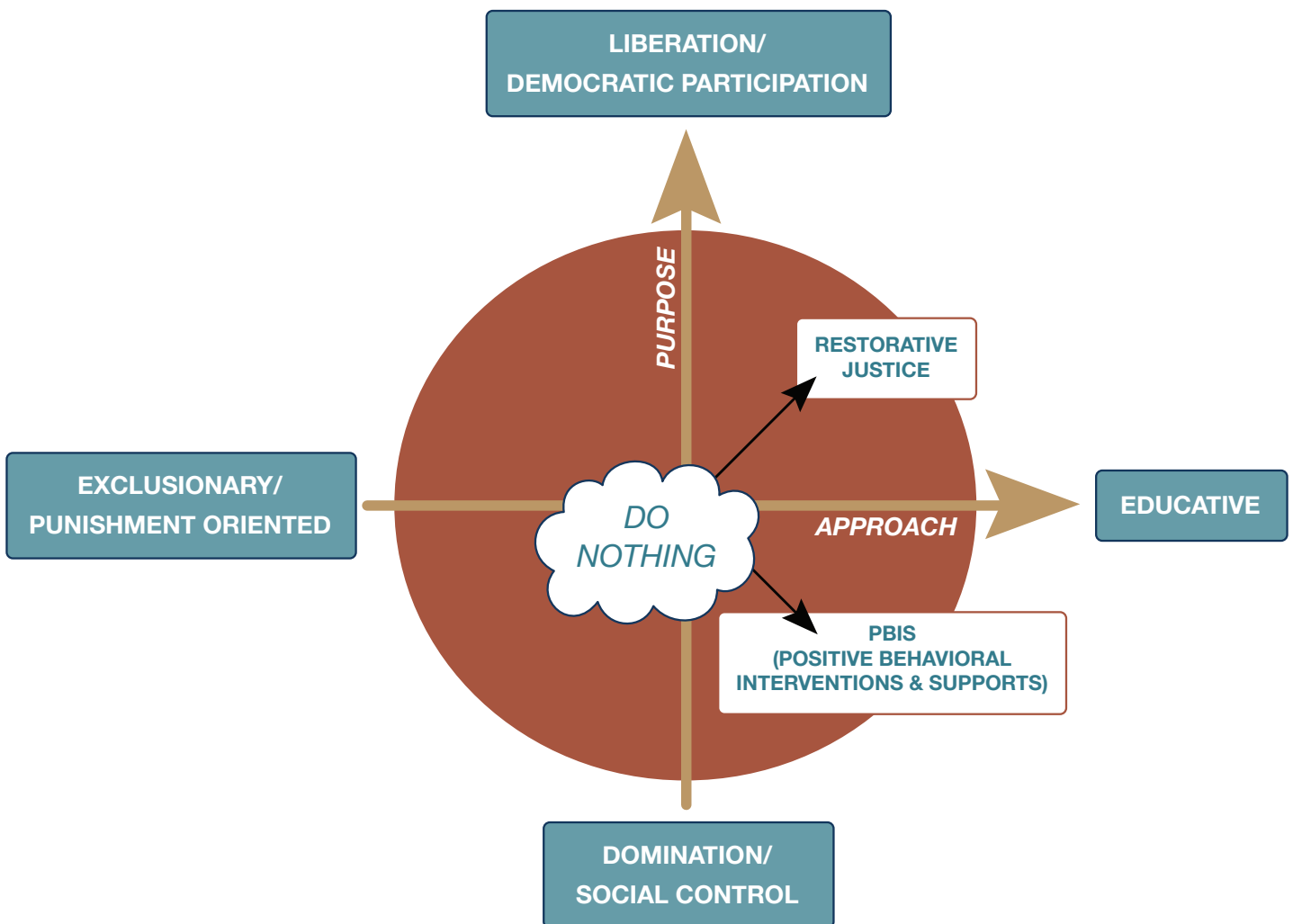
SCHOOLS PLOTTED BY ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES OBSERVED



Furthermore, it is important to note when comparing the impact of different approaches that we found a wide range of practices under the umbrella of what educators called Restorative Justice. We describe these more fully below.

Figure 12: Impact of Alternative Approach on a School's Location on the School Climate and Culture Quadrants

IMPACT OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES ADOPTED



POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (PBIS) ENCOURAGES MORE EDUCATIVE APPROACHES TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE BUT ALIGNS WELL WITH SOCIAL CONTROL TENDENCIES IN SCHOOLS

Among schools that had an articulated plan for school climate and culture, we found schools that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) tended to have a more educative approach to discipline. While PBIS practices were associated with more educative approaches to school discipline, PBIS practices did not challenge the tendency for schools' primary goal of discipline to be social control. Behavioral expectations were made explicit and posted on posters throughout the schools, and often translated to meet the needs of different school spaces such as hallways, offices, classrooms, and lunchrooms. Good behaviors were commended and rewarded through awards assemblies, pizza parties, and PBIS rewards or "bucks" that could be used to purchase items at the school store.

Adopting a PBIS approach also created school climate and culture teams in many schools in our sample, which became useful sites for collaboration for other school climate and culture concerns. For example, in one Northern California school, a multi-institutional school climate and culture team functioned as a place for student support service providers to work together. This group discussed planning a school fun day and how to get teachers to give out PBIS "bucks" in class. We found that the component of the PBIS model that enjoyed the least amount of institutionalization was PBIS "bucks."

Despite PBIS' aid in moving schools toward more educative approaches to discipline, in schools that most fully implemented PBIS, we found that administrators and teachers leading the implementation efforts often described the purpose of school discipline as teaching students to behave. In these schools, teacher demand for supervision and control of out-of-classroom spaces were particularly notable. Any space where a student could potentially be present had detailed rules for how students should act — down to detailing how students should wash their hands in the bathroom. The principal and leader of the PBIS leadership team in one such school were most proud of their school's quiet, gender-separated, orderly lines.

In these schools, teacher demand for supervision and control of out-of-classroom spaces were particularly notable.

When students move from Tier One to Tier Two and Three, their behavior increasingly becomes the sole focus. Interventions concentrate on addressing student behavioral issues and accentuate monitoring and surveillance aspects of the relationship between student and teacher.

In one middle school that had limited implementation of PBIS, permissiveness and chaos pervaded the school. In this school, teachers focused on students' inability to follow the rules and defiance of adults. Teachers saw little utility in a school-wide system because they did not feel it would change student behavior.

"I don't know how to make this change. As a whole school, because it's not just in my classroom. I can affect the change in my classroom, for sure ... I don't have as clear of a tiered model. Why? Because not all kids fit in that tiered model, and quite frankly, I'm not going to make up a consequence system for our school when that's not my job. I don't get paid enough to do that. I will deal with the behavior that's in front of me, and quite frankly, my motto is: the punishment is going to fit the crime."

Here the teacher relates PBIS' inefficacy directly to its inability to ensure student obedience to adult-determined rules.

Educators and administrators often described the first tier of PBIS as rewarding students for good behavior, which include strategies for community-building. Subsequent tiers provided more targeted support for individual students. We found that support included social services and, often, mechanisms of monitoring and surveillance.

The students who fell into Tier Three received the most social supports as well as intensive monitoring:

"So, your Tier Twos would get a check-in, check-out that they would turn in once a week. So, we're monitoring their progress, and they would get a reward, like a basketball or something, if they make all their points for that week. And then your Tier Threes are your high at-risks, and they're gonna meet with the school social worker. They're gonna meet with the psychiatrist. They're gonna be watched much more closely and given more support so that they can be successful throughout the day ... and then it could be something, it could be that they're constantly a disruption in class, so the form's gonna be there to remind them not to cause a class disruption. It could be they throw something regularly, or it could be that they talk while the teacher is talking. It could be the point where they did a technology ticket, where they went where they weren't supposed to go, or they were doing something inappropriate on the school technology, so then you know when they're on the internet to put them on Go Guardian and watch that student a little bit closer."

When students move from Tier One to Tier Two and Three, their behavior increasingly becomes the sole focus. Interventions concentrate on addressing student behavioral issues and accentuate monitoring and surveillance aspects of the relationship between student and teacher.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MOVE SCHOOLS TOWARD MORE EDUCATIVE AND LIBERATORY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE CULTURES

In a few of our focal schools, we found that restorative justice (RJ) strengthened already educative and democratic participatory or even liberatory tendencies in the school.⁴⁹ In one school, a group of teachers understood restorative justice as an extension of the caring, interpersonal approach they were already employing with their students. They recognized the ways Restorative Justice allowed for different types of relationships among students and between teachers and students. Restorative justice, for this group, was not necessarily a transformation of teaching. Rather, it offered an opportunity to connect deeply with their students. Teachers described how participating in the RJ circle benefitted their teaching practice and contributed to a more supportive dynamic amongst the teaching staff. Additionally, teachers felt that using RJ in their classrooms made them more comfortable with being vulnerable with their students and more aware and empathetic of the challenges in their students' personal lives.

For other schools, our data suggest that RJ has the potential to move schools away from domination, social control, exclusion, and punishment and toward more educative and liberatory spaces. We found that RJ does this in two primary ways: through a process of collective humanization and healing during circles; and through creating a values-consistent alignment between curriculum, pedagogy, and discipline that support students to understand and transform their world.

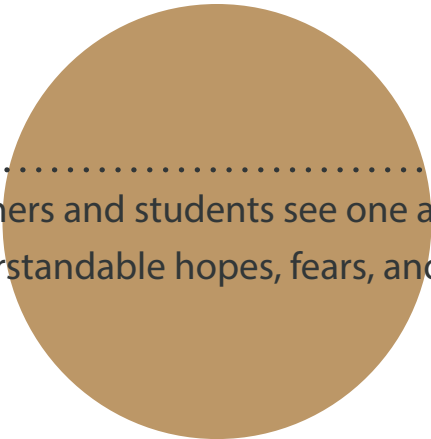
For some teachers, RJ circles and conversations were transformative for humanizing and building empathy for students.

A teacher describes the impact of RJ on her teaching:

“For me, I don’t have kids. Never wanted them. For me to make a conscious choice to try to know them beyond the 47 minutes that I have them made it a little bit more personal to me whether or not they succeeded or failed. It was good for me to get a better idea of what they do outside of this, because if I see them just during class where they’re staring off into space ... Now I know, are you staring off into space because you ... Did you have to babysit last night? Yeah. Okay, you’re probably a little tired. All right. It makes it a little bit easier for me to understand, instead of just assuming, ‘God, pay attention, will you?’ Instead of that kind of thing, I get a little less blamey, I guess.”

Teachers who did not necessarily go into teaching because they loved being around young people or because they felt a political purpose for education could still come to understand and empathize with their students through the RJ process. RJ also had the potential to humanize teachers to students. A teacher explains:

“So, one of the things that really I took away from the [RJ] training is that you don’t know what they’re going through and sometimes those things can cause them to act out. So being more conscious instead of instantly getting angry and sending them out. Actually trying to talk to them and pushing, if we can, to do a circle in class ... And the students, a lot of students don’t think I’m like a real person. They think I live here. So, I think sometimes it makes you more human to them. And they’re able to show more respect towards you because they now know you’re a person and you have feelings.”



Through RJ circles, both teachers and students see one another as human beings with understandable hopes, fears, and joys.

Educators with more advanced practices of RJ used RJ circles for collective healing when difficult topics came up in class.

“Most of the circles that we hold are not harm circles, they’re healing circles. And they’re peace-building circles in the classroom. Whereas, if you look at most schools, the circles that they hold, they’re harm circles because it has to do with fights. And that’s important to have but we also have to have these circles in the classroom where we are also healing traumas that young people have lived. But we do that in the classroom. That will help with discipline outside of the classroom. It’s a more holistic approach ... So, with this activity that we’re doing, the timeline ... A lot of them shared out that they’ve lost someone in their life. And so, when we share out the timeline, we’re going to get in a circle. And so, kids are always going to ... [Chokes up] Sorry, I was just remembering last year. It’s always very emotional because you have kids that talk about their trauma and losing a loved one or having someone incarcerated. We always have kids that start just crying.”

In these classrooms, being quiet, behaving, and getting work done were not prioritized at the expense of young people’s human needs to mourn or to care for their families. Students’ lives were allowed into the classroom.

Similarly, circles between students help them resolve issues and humanize others even when traditional divisions that lead to bullying would keep them apart. In one school, students during a focus group explained how RJ was used to resolve a bullying incident between a group of seventh and eighth graders. The student recalls:

“Well, they put us seventh graders and eighth graders together and at the end our teacher kind of told us like, ‘There’s no difference. You guys are seventh graders and eighth graders, there’s just one year of age difference.’ And it did solve a problem because those eighth graders stopped saying that [mean name] ... Basically the RJ circle just brought to our attention we’re all [name of middle school] students, like we’re all just one big family instead of ... competition versus seventh graders and eighth graders.”

In this example, students rise above some of the divisions that separate students and the competitive nature of much of our society, to see that they are all one big family.

Restorative justice circles were also helpful in building understanding during an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting that can often become contentious or demoralizing for parents of students with disabilities.

“I had one IEP done like [a circle] one time ... That was very interesting. It was a parent who had some issues with the school. People at the district, the principals, assistant principals, myself, parents, advocates. It was done circle-style, and it turned out very well ... Everybody had a turn to speak and went around and talked about first, I think it was, ‘How are you feeling about today?’ It was a nice like okay, everybody eased into it. Everybody got a chance to say, ‘what is it that we really want?’ It gave him and the parent a chance to hear everybody’s perspective. We all wanted the best interest for him. It was nice.”

We also found that RJ has the potential to shift schools toward the educative and liberatory quadrant of the School Climate and Culture Quadrants when teachers or schools align curriculum, pedagogy, and discipline so that students are learning about the world and their place in it. We observed a social studies teacher share their own migration stories through a slideshow of family pictures and weave in history and politics. Teachers also taught the Indigenous roots of RJ to connect to the traditional cultures of students and use RJ principles to critically examine the role of Columbus in the Americas.

In these ways, teachers in this school thought through how to enliven content with restorative justice practices, not relegating RJ only to discipline issues. Finally, Ethnic Studies nurtured students’ identity development and relationship to their communities. In Ethnic Studies, students learn content that is relevant to their lives and occurs in their school. The requirement of Ethnic Studies for ninth graders dedicates staff planning and instructional time to the historical and current experiences of students’ communities.

THE POTENTIAL OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IS DEPENDENT ON THE MODEL OF RJ PRACTICED

Results of varied forms of restorative justice differed. In our study, we visited schools that implemented a range of RJ practices. Our analysis of that data suggests that where RJ moved the schools on the School Climate and Culture Quadrants depended on the underlying values and principles of RJ and the form of RJ implemented.

RACE-CONSCIOUS & CRITICAL SYSTEMS APPROACH TO RESTORATIVE JUSTICE. As one of the earliest proponents of restorative justice (RJ), Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY)'s mission is to "interrupt cycles of incarceration, violence, and wasted lives by promoting institutional shifts toward restorative approaches that actively engage families, communities, and systems to repair harm and prevent re-offending." This model of RJ recognizes the injustices in the world and the need to engage those most impacted in healing, transforming themselves, and transforming the systems around them. RJOY explicitly critiques racism, police, and mass incarceration in the United States and provides an alternative to these systems based on culture, self-sufficiency, and community. Another organization that was influenced by RJOY was the California Conference for Equality and Justice (CCEJ), which was originally a part of a national organization founded to promote interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews. The organization's origin recognized how people's social identities and positions create conflict, and shifted to providing RJ training. We found that of the four programs, RJOY and CCEJ shared a race-conscious and critical systems approach to RJ.

In each, RJ was seen as a way to ameliorate much deeper systemic issues while building more community capacity, connection, and movement potential. One trainer explains:

"I'm clear that RJ is not the solution, the ultimate solution, to a lot of what's happening. Particularly, I understand that there is a capitalist economic system, like racialized capitalism that's resulting in inadequate allocation of resources. That's not to say that schools that have more money, have built deep relationships, and don't have any discipline problems, but we know that one of the main problems why there's so much stuff going on is because people are hungry, people are traumatized, people aren't getting enough sleep, housing instability, young people, Black and Brown students getting under-prepared or unprepared."

We found that in schools where the RJ model could be traced to a more race-conscious and systemic analysis of harm and healing, schools used RJ to build community and humanize the other, and RJ practices better aligned with teaching and curriculum.

In addition to differences among RJ trainers, there are differences in RJ practices that matter for the impact that the adoption of this approach has on the school discipline culture of a school. Figure 13 provides a brief summary of these different practices and examines how these practices in schools affected the schools in our sample.

Figure 13: Summary Table of Diversity of Restorative Justice (RJ) Practices

RJ PRACTICE	GOALS	PRACTICE FEATURES
COMMUNITY BUILDING CIRCLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build community and relationships. Develop understanding and empathy towards one another. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group meets around a circle. Participants take turns speaking with a talking stick or object. Circle topics can range from <i>“Who is a significant person in your life and why?”</i> to <i>“How do we want to be together in this space?”</i>
RESTORATIVE CONVERSATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain community norms and relationships. Recognition of the interconnectivity of individual behaviors and actions, and the impact individual actions have on others. Repair and reconcile individual conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults and students avoid knee-jerk reactions to punish or retaliate against harmful, disruptive, or disrespectful behavior by conversations that occur impromptu in classrooms, in hallways, in passing and focus on questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What happened? What were you thinking or feeling at the time? Who was affected and how? How can we make things right?
HARM OR HEALING CIRCLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repair relationships by creating an opportunity for those who have harmed and all those who have been harmed to establish an open dialogue, develop understanding of and respect for each other, and reconcile the situation. Facilitate personal development growth through students learning about alter Indigenous approaches to similar situations in the future. Heal students’ relationship with the institution of schooling by creating a way for students who are often involved with disciplinary infractions to engage more with their school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal conferencing with all affected parties led by a trained facilitator. Facilitator passes around a talking stick or object. All those involved have the opportunity to answer a series of questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What happened? What were you thinking or feeling at the time? How were you affected? How can we make things right?
PEER MEDIATORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop young people’s capacity to lead harm or healing circles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often organized around a class that students take as an elective, students are taught the principles of RJ and then mentored to guide peers through a harm circle.
COOPERATIVE STUDENT-CENTERED & CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster and practice dialogue as an essential component of learning. Develop students’ critical consciousness of the world and a deeper understanding of their relationship to personal identity, local community, and broader social structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach and practice dialogue through group work, cooperative learning, socratic seminars, and talking circles, all of which explore larger questions of justice and injustice.

LIMITS OF HARM CIRCLES ALONE. There were patterns in how schools adapted restorative justice (RJ) to meet their needs which were consequential to students' discipline experience. Most schools in our sample that practiced RJ reported using only the harm circle, relegating RJ to an alternative punishment for some behaviors and some kids, but not all.

Recasting RJ as an educative punishment vis-à-vis harm circles was demonstrated through teacher and student descriptions of harm circles that focused on those who needed to be "reformed." One administrator describes the added benefits of RJ for reforming students:

"Who likes saying they're sorry, and who likes to own up to what they did and it's not very often that kids will do that. They get suspended and who are they saying they're sorry to? What did they learn from it? So, [restorative justice] is great because not only do they get suspended, they get this too."

The goal of these harm circles was to identify ways students could appropriately demonstrate remorse or stop disruptive behavior. Rather than restored relationships, the emphasis was on students taking responsibility for bad behavior.

RJ as harm circles also had little impact on teaching and learning. Unlike community-building circles which required the whole community, whether it be classroom or school, harm circles reduced the conflict to interpersonal issues. Harm circles could easily be practiced outside of classrooms, divorcing conflict from the purview of teaching and learning. Even when schools did harm circles between a teacher and a student, they were conducted outside the classroom, often repairing the relationship between teacher and student, but not necessarily building relationships between students or creating entryways into learning.

CHALLENGES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (RJ) PEER MEDIATION. In three schools, we found programs that trained student restorative justice or peer mediators. The presence of these programs coincided with at least one administrator who championed youth leadership opportunities and the importance of building the school community. Additionally, students who acted as peer mediators felt connected to the school community and expressed confidence as leaders.

However, we also saw a troubling trend with peer mediators. We found the primary benefit of these programs accrued to the student mediators as they were positioned as student leaders and gained new skills around conflict resolution. Adults were assigned to coordinate these programs on top of existing responsibilities. For example, one of the programs had minimal adult support and guidance. The dean had taken over the program from the RJ coordinator who had started it. He had multiple responsibilities and had limited capacity in fostering a robust restorative justice model. A teacher who had extensive RJ training led another program, but also maintained teaching responsibilities. Peer mediators were only available for a few periods of the school day. In the other periods of the day, that room operated as in-house suspension.

With little guidance to critically interrogate why and how punitive discipline exists in schools, peer mediators often asked their peers to conform to existing school rules. One student peer mediator explained:

"I pretty much have to help solve a problem with the students like say, if it's an argument in class and it got heated up, or they fought, I would have to come too. Then, they would go to the counselor. Some of them just go straight to the counselor, but if they go to the counselor, they usually get arrested, if it's something bad or there's going to be a suspension."

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We believe that peer mediation offered leadership opportunities to the peer mediators but provided little benefit in shaping school culture and climate for the broader school community. Instead, peer mediation reinforced divisions among students who were seen as student leaders and students who had to be “mediated” felt marginalized by their peers.

In a way, peer mediators became aligned with the teacher and enforced adult authority and adult-defined rules. One student explained their perspective of the role of peer mediators:

“I was present at one of the [...] mediations. But the biggest thing that they do is threaten the students. Like either you resolve, either you stop fighting and you call a truce between this girl, or we’re gonna call your mom. Or we’re gonna get people to like ... they just threaten them, in a way, with their authority. Which, that doesn’t really solve anything. You’re not resolving the problem, you’re just instilling fear in the person.”

Student mediators often used punitive language to describe their peers who participated in the peer-led mediations. In contrast, students participating in peer mediations described being forced into a resolution, even when parties in the conflict felt reluctant to do so. Moreover, peer mediators tended to be “A-students” and “college-bound” reproducing hierarchies among students. As a result, peer mediation was experienced by students as a punitive process directed by more socially privileged classmates.

Sometimes, the peer leaders themselves felt harmed and were unsure of where to turn. In one school, a Black student shared that in her role as a peer mediator, she was assigned to deal with all the conflict occurring among the Black students in the school. As the one lone Black peer mediator, she was over-burdened and hyper-visible. Additionally, she felt singled out and marginalized within the peer mediation class which had mostly Latinx students. In speaking with this school’s peer mediator coordinator, who also was the school dean, there was little awareness of these issues. Largely, the peer mediators were seen as school leaders and left to manage the program themselves, given the dean’s multiple responsibilities.

Interestingly, among the teachers we interviewed, there was little report of using peer mediators. We believe that peer mediation offered leadership opportunities to the peer mediators but provided little benefit in shaping school culture and climate for the broader school community. Instead, peer mediation reinforced divisions among students who were seen as student leaders and students who had to be “mediated” felt marginalized by their peers.

LIMITS OF RESTORING JUSTICE WHEN AUTHORITY AND ONE TRUTH ARE UNQUESTIONED. The school where Restorative Justice (RJ) was most deeply practiced also left the research team with some questions about the limits of some models of RJ alone to create liberatory schooling. In this school, we found all of the elements of successful implementation that we outline in the subsection above and multiple moving accounts of how RJ was practiced in the school and in the lives of students, parents, teachers, and administrators to build community, restore relationships, and address harms.

What distinguished this case from all the others was that it was an independent, faith-based school. Educators here explained that restorative justice aligned ethically and intellectually with the Christian values of reflection, self-discovery, mercy, and grace. From the student perspective, students shared that teachers give them chances because God gives them chances. A teacher explains:

“Well, since we’ve gone to restorative discipline ... it has changed. It used to be much more, I don’t like the word, but legalistic. In other words, ‘here’s the rules, you break them, first offense, here’s your discipline, second offense, here’s your discipline, third offense, usually if it’s serious, we’re gonna ask you to leave,’ kinda deal. I have seen our principal, in particular, work with students, and not just, ‘Okay, here’s the boot buddy. We’ll see you.’ We care about people, and so restorative discipline to me is more caring about people.”

Here, a teacher explained that the transition to restorative justice moved the school away from legalistic implementation of discipline to one that cares about people.

This school practiced Restorative Justice to build and restore community. We saw evidence and learned of instances where educators in this school used Restorative Justice to identify classroom respect agreements, respect agreements among staff, address student-teacher conflicts, address student-student conflicts, address teachers’ poor performance, restore parent-child relationships, and to restore students back to the community when they transgressed. For example, a student who was drinking too much on the weekends was engaged in a restorative justice circle.

At the same time, as one educator explains, the school’s founders “wanted the word of God to be preminent, and that Jesus be proclaimed as Lord. That has not changed.” Here, the Bible was truth, and thus, students were not allowed to dance, and homosexuality was sin. Thus, a gay student was deemed as in need of restoration. Given multiple chances to renounce his sexuality and restore himself to the community, the student refused, and he was expelled from the school. A previous superintendent who allowed a gay alumnus to host a fashion show was removed from his position. In this case, educators wielded restorative justice successfully to build and maintain a close-knit community with shared values. The success of this case co-existed with the expulsion of gay students.

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STRATEGIES FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IMPLEMENTATION MATTERED FOR INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Schools and districts took a variety of approaches to implement restorative justice (RJ) at their school in line with their vision of school culture and climate. The four primary approaches to implementation were: 1) hiring a school site coordinator; 2) creating a district office or subunit dedicated to restorative justice; 3) one-off training; and 4) ongoing coaching and technical assistance. These implementation strategies resulted in more individualized approaches such that implementation essentially occurred classroom by classroom. Funding constraints curbed any possibility that these strategies would lead to widespread implementation.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE COORDINATORS HAVE AN IMPOSSIBLE JOB. We found that having a restorative justice (RJ) coordinator on school sites narrowed implementation to the capacities of one individual, thereby having a limited impact on the overall school site. Seven schools in our sample had RJ coordinators at the school site. Of those seven, only one was a full-time position dedicated to the implementation of restorative justice. The other school site had part-time RJ coordinators who usually held administrative or instructional responsibilities or were classified staff. Notably, an outside non-profit that worked in partnership with the district funded the one full-time RJ coordinator. Part-time RJ coordinators came out of district or school site funds, indicating the challenge of creating fully funded positions.

Regardless of full-time or part-time status, we found that designating an RJ coordinator displaced all things RJ onto the shoulders of that one individual. Most teachers did not have access to ongoing support, training, and resources to incorporate RJ into the classrooms. Under the pressure of the daily demands of the classroom, sending students to the RJ coordinator did not require teachers to disrupt the existing repertoire of classroom practices.

RJ coordinators, unsurprisingly, were skilled in building relationships. For example, at one high school, teachers often praised the coordinator's efforts and expressed their regard for her, despite skepticism — indeed, often anger — about the implementation of restorative practices. However, because RJ coordinators were not included in school leadership teams with sitewide influence, they were unable to leverage these relationships.

The one school that had a full-time RJ coordinator provided a useful example. In her first years at the school, the RJ coordinator found her time consumed by harm circles. Over the years and with the time afforded as a full-time staff person, she found ways to shift some of her work toward whole school community-building campaigns, and training and supporting interested teachers. The coordinator created a broad base of awareness and support for restorative justice that spanned campus security officers, grounds people, and faculty. This RJ coordinator had strong, individual relationships with school leaders who spoke highly of her commitment to the school's young people and her personal integrity in relationship-building. Yet this RJ coordinator's participation on school leadership teams was delimited to the ninth grade leadership team which veteran teachers of color with long-standing commitments to social justice anchored. The coordinator did not have access to system-level supports that could be leveraged to move implementation beyond individual relationships.

DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION SEEN AS MORE-OF-THE-SAME TOP-DOWN INITIATIVES.

In three school districts in our sample, district leaders created a district office or subunit dedicated to restorative justice (RJ), a signal of district-level institutional commitment to RJ. These subunits typically provided professional development and technical assistance to schools interested in implementing RJ. However, we found that these approaches to teacher learning did not lead to sustainable changes, and often created adversarial relationships between the district central office and teachers who viewed RJ as a “top-down” initiative.

CONSULTANT MODEL ONE-OFF TRAININGS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WERE QUICKLY FORGOTTEN.

Given time and resource constraints, one-off professional development sessions offered an overview and exposure rather than deep engagement with content. In some ways, this was useful for initiating interest — a few teachers in our sample reported becoming curious about RJ after attending a professional development session they opted into. In the case of mandated one-off training for RJ, most teachers summarily dismissed or simply forgot their experience. Our data suggest that the teachers who were motivated to incorporate RJ had teacher education training and personal histories that prominently featured commitments to social justice.

The findings around one-time, professional development sessions suggest that ongoing, technical support for teachers might have longer-lasting impact. District subunits and RJ organizations contracted by schools often adopted this model. Due to financial constraints, we found that technical assistance for RJ had the same intermittent, individualized quality of professional development sessions. Furthermore, the technical assistance focused on learning practice-based aspects of RJ, such as holding community circles. Teacher learning opportunities did not seem to offer time for teachers to engage deeply with RJ and think through creative ways to weave it into the classroom.

POTENTIAL LESSONS FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IMPLEMENTATION TAKEN FROM POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (PBIS) IMPLEMENTATION.

Restorative justice (RJ) implementation strategies primarily benefited individual teachers but did not necessarily translate RJ into a whole-school approach. The success of Positive Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is, in part, because it offers schools a program and a set of systems that support, sustain, and monitor implementation. Structures such as implementation teams, common agreements and shared goals around RJ, consistent training with opportunities for feedback, and formative and summative measures of progress clarify for schools where to invest resources.

In efforts to create systems to widen the impact of RJ implementation, it is critical not to lose the heart of RJ, which lies in relationships. The teachers and administrators transformed by Restorative Justice experienced it through relationships — whether it was sitting in circle with students or colleagues or working closely with a trained RJ practitioner to think creatively about how to bring RJ into the classroom. As we discuss below, RJ must be constantly modeled and practiced across all relationships, including amongst adults, in a school community for it to take hold.

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In the case of mandated one-off training for RJ, most teachers summarily dismissed or simply forgot their experience. Our data suggest that the teachers who were motivated to incorporate RJ had teacher education training and personal histories that prominently featured commitments to social justice.

FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IMPLEMENTATION

Across our case studies, we found some common features that characterized the successful implementation of restorative justice.

First, school administrators, RJ staff, and RJ trainers focused on restorative justice principles and values, such as inclusivity, mutuality, egalitarianism, and reparation, rather than simply restorative practices. In these schools, school administrators or RJ leaders were often trained through university-based restorative justice programs such as Fresno Pacific University and Colorado State University. Those trained by Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) also expressed a more nuanced understanding of the underlying principles and values, especially those practicing for a number of years. These leaders recognized that restorative justice requires a paradigm shift or alignment toward core values and beliefs, and practices and systems.

Second, taking a restorative approach to implementation contributed to the success of RJ. For example, one high school in the Central Valley intentionally sought the involvement and buy-in of multiple stakeholders within different positions of power — from the superintendent and politicians to teachers and students. Restorative justice thus became a practice where all stakeholders held a piece of the work, depending on their expertise and positionality. Motivated to be less punitive and

change the educational experience for teachers and students, this high school leveraged its relationships and approached the Board to adopt restorative justice before it was mandated at the state level. The superintendent supported transparency and sustainability through access to quality resources. The partnership with a local university provided quality foundational training in restorative justice that school administrators participated in first to adapt schoolwide systems to meet teacher needs. The conflict resolution coordinator holds the restorative space to resolve conflicts. Thus, teachers are supported to deliver high-quality instruction, and students are held accountable to participate in the learning environment with both adult and peer support.

Third, administrators utilized restorative justice circles and principles when approaching staff conflicts and staff performance issues. One administrator explained that when a teacher was struggling, they would respond restoratively by listening to the teacher's experiences and needs, and by expressing the negative impact of the teacher's action on the larger community. Another school that more fully practiced RJ handled tensions between teachers and administrators over a union issue through restorative justice circles.

Similarly, educators utilized Restorative Justice circles and principles in their classrooms to develop community respect agreements, build community, and discuss topics with students. In this way, restorative justice was used to build and restore all relationships on the school campus.

Fourth, the implementation process itself was restorative in nature. Teachers were not forced to attend and punished for not practicing. These schools invited teachers in to experience something new and perhaps gain a useful resource. Through the training experience and participating in circles, educators saw the significance of the practice and gained skill and confidence in running circles. Excited teachers and staff

then demonstrated its benefits to their more skeptical peers.

School leaders and RJ coordinators continued to model these practices and coach teachers to improve their craft throughout this process.

Fifth, training was lengthy and sustained over time. One school leader explains the slow and sustained process they adopted for training and modeling restorative justice:

“One of the big things I would say is our restorative justice program. We’re in our probably fourth full year of implementation, but we started about two years prior to that in training. We trained in groups of about eight teachers at a time, along with some of the administration. We didn’t do a week-long process, we did one full day. Teachers would get some information, go back and practice and come back the next month. We did four. We did about a third, a third, and a third until we got all staff trained.”

This was a model utilized by a university-led restorative justice model. The attention to the time it takes to learn something new supported the institutionalization of the practice in this school. Additionally, schools with

more successful institutionalization of RJ trained all new teachers in restorative justice.

During the hiring and onboarding process in these schools, school leaders set the tone for how they expected teachers to build relationships with students, use mistakes as a teaching moment, and use restorative justice when conflicts arose. In these schools, new teachers were often trained in restorative justice.

Finally, in each of the schools that more fully practiced RJ, the school leader was trained and experienced in leading RJ practices. In these schools, the school leader or RJ coordinator was often trained in RJ through their graduate education or educator preparation program. In one school where the administrator had not been, they made up for this by participating in a sustained university-led RJ training for each of their cohort of teachers.

“I did the training with all of them, with all the cohorts [of my teachers]. That was eye-opening for me because if I was going to make this change, I needed to be aware of exactly what I needed to expect on how the system was going to work.”

School leaders who were strong proponents of RJ were often teachers who first practiced RJ themselves before becoming school leaders.

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ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Our data suggest that the investments of The California Endowment initiated multiple changes to schools in arenas above the green line, such as school policies and programs. But these changes are fragile and tentative because there has been limited change in organizational structures or below the green line in terms of how discipline is understood and practiced in schools.

Changing formal organizational structures — like staffing, collaboration time, and leadership structures — within schools was essential to changing every day disciplinary practices. And changing formal organizational structures often impacted the capacity to change practices and the durability of those changes. When strategies did not include changing formal organizational structures, we found that there was little room in the day-to-day work of teaching, learning, and supervising a school for applying and practicing alternative forms of discipline. We identify the constitution of the leadership team, the academic press and traditional bell schedule of the school day, and existing punitive structures as key constraints in shifting discipline practices. Understanding these institutional constraints to school discipline reforms humble our expectations for immediate results. They also suggest that school discipline reform efforts work more closely with efforts to challenge other dehumanizing or dysfunctional aspects of schools for students and educators.

SUPPORTS: WHOLE-SCHOOL REORGANIZATION.

In schools where we heard the most encouraging turn-around stories of school transformation, school discipline reforms were just one of many changes; schools made changes to deeper organizational structures first. In each of the four schools in which we heard near-universal descriptions of improved school climate and safety, the school enrollment fell, either intentionally or unintentionally, which created an

overall smaller school and closer relationships among staff and students.

Three of the four schools created smaller learning communities so that a smaller group of teachers shared the same students. With this reorganization, these schools created teacher collaboration time to allow teachers to plan curriculum and discuss students.

Then, community partners were invited in to provide after-school programs, youth leadership and development, and student mental health supports. Restorative justice (RJ) or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) were implemented along with other changes to create a common approach to discipline. Whole school reorganization, led by educators, created organizational features, like common planning time and student supports, that also supported the later adoption of alternatives to punishment.

OBSTACLES: ADD-ONS BECOME AFTER-THOUGHTS.

Throughout the state, we found that the responsibility of leadership and coordination for these new programs were add-ons, which made them after-thoughts in the day-to-day life of school. Most often, the responsibility was relegated to existing staff who had to juggle the program's work with existing job responsibilities. On one hand, the inclination to have someone who is part of the school community suggests a ground-up approach that would allow for the program to take root in the school culture and life. However, our data indicate that these programs were usually added on to the existing responsibilities of one individual. They were often administrators or teachers that already had a significant amount of responsibilities. Other times, they were classified staff from the community who cared for students like their own and were known for their ability to work with young people. When given these additional responsibilities, classified staff were rarely compensated accordingly.

Furthermore, unless the program coordinator was also an administrator who was an existing member of the school leadership team, those responsible for these new programs, particularly if the program was one rooted in restorative justice principles, were rarely incorporated into leadership structures in the school. The leadership around these programs remained siloed, unable to influence core school operations such as teaching and learning. In this way, programs often became “located” in one or two individuals who were responsible for program implementation. In PBIS programs, this person problem-solved and tried to support teachers. In RJ programs, this person often became the sole practitioner.

OBSTACLES: NO TIME IN THE SCHOOL DAY FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING OR MAINTENANCE. One of the biggest concerns raised by educators and observed on our school site visits was that there was little time or space for adults to build relationships with students or with one another. Rather than restructuring the school day to allow for relationship building, many schools maintained a seven-period bell schedule and large class sizes, which constrained teachers’ ability to build relationships and try different discipline approaches.

“The follow up or the follow through, sometimes, takes a lot. And the class sizes of up to 40 students right now. After 40 even if you have ten percent of them not doing what they’re supposed to, that’s four times your five classes. That’s 20 kids that you’ve got to sit in a circle. These circles all take an hour, you don’t have that many hours in a day, you know. And sometimes the infractions are so great that you don’t have time to sit with them. You just have to take care of situations right away.”

This teacher describes the immensity of replacing punitive or exclusionary discipline with restorative ones with current class sizes. Many teachers whose teaching philosophies aligned with restorative justice, and other positive forms of discipline, felt unable to do so given curricular and testing demands.

“[Restorative justice] would be ideal. I don’t know if all teachers would feel that, but, ideal.

The only thing is, if you do RJ and you say, ‘This is really gonna help,’ and you have to, let’s say, have four circles in a month. Right? In the same class... If we could be absolved of those four days, where we don’t have to worry about curriculum at all, I think maybe the teachers would be a lot more ... Because I worry about curriculum all the time, people tell me, ‘Oh, we only got through one unit,’ I was like, ‘I went as fast as I could,’ right? And I already took out this, and this, and this. I go, ‘Oh, we haven’t gotten to this at all, and the SBAC is next week,’ right?”

Across our school sample, we observed many schools with 35 or more students. Class size arose as a major obstacle for restorative justice. Not only was it impossible to fit that many students in a circle within one classroom, the facilitation of a deep conversation in a group that large would be almost impossible.

“You know, [the restorative justice] concept is so meaningful. It is standing on sacred land because it’s that good. But how can I run such an awesome program with 41 souls in my classroom? How can I do it? The district is full of nonsense, the administration fits into that nonsense.”

In another district, teachers had “sold back” their preparation period in the day to reduce class sizes, leaving no non-teaching time in the day for any conferencing with students or parents. These organizational constraints created significant obstacles to teachers moving away from punitive or exclusionary discipline.

OBSTACLES: OLD STRUCTURES PERPETUATE

OLD PRACTICES. The continued use of punitive structures and practices muted the potential impact of alternative school discipline approaches. Alongside the alternative discipline practices, positions like the dean of students and suspension rooms continued with exclusionary and punitive modes of discipline. The dean of students is traditionally a role associated with student discipline. The presence of this role suggests that there are behaviors that warrant student exclusion and punishment. However, there were deans in our sample that used restorative practices.

Yet the act of sending the student out of the class, whether or not the dean used restorative practices, removed the student from the classroom community, as clearly shown in this synopsis of a teacher interview:

“She said that she went to the dean because she was having issues with a student. This student was being insolent, she was trying to scaffold discipline, but he was being really, really disrespectful. She called campus security to remove the student, and the dean told her she has to fill out the paperwork. She was really upset at this because she’s trying to teach 37 other students a lesson, and she just needed the immediate removal of the student so she could teach the kids that wanted to learn. She says there’s difficulty because there’s too much bureaucracy, but no classroom support.”

The presence of a dean to manage student behavior and the lack of transparency in the process ensure that exclusion and punishment remain an expectation of teachers in a discipline system.

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The continued use of punitive structures and practices muted the potential impact of alternative school discipline approaches. Positions like the dean of students or suspension rooms continued with exclusionary and punitive modes of discipline alongside the alternative discipline practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTS

The data on how formal organizational structures did not change to support alternative discipline practices inform our proposals for effective strategies and supports:

1. Create leadership teams that are inclusive of roles and identities. Schools that had Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) teams or school culture teams that included administrators, lead teachers, and key support staff had higher levels of implementation and greater sustainability. Additionally, these leadership teams designed and implemented consequential school programming such as curriculum and instruction, professional development, and student life. The presence of the PBIS or the restorative justice (RJ) coordinator on a school leadership team allowed for the principles of those programs to pollinate school structures.

2. Dismantle old structures. Schools that removed suspension policies, replaced punitive deans with experts in other approaches, shifted funds from police to counselors, and shut down in-school suspension rooms were more likely to see shifts in everyday practices. The availability of punitive structures operated as a container that confirmed and extended punitive and exclusionary practices in the classroom. Shifting and dedicating resources and school structures to alternative practices created a clear signal to teachers that discipline practices needed to shift.

3. Create student-centered and teacher-centered school structures. The most promising schools adjusted the normal school day to have regular teacher collaboration time, advisories, small learning communities, restorative justice courses, or modified block schedules. No one school structure can create the culture that nurtures healthy, caring relationships among all school community member; having multiple structures allowed for relationships across adults and young people to develop around the purpose of meaningful learning activity that held students to high academic and social expectations.

For example, at one high school in Southern California, there was a vibrant youth culture. Schools were organized into learning communities, and there were significant opportunities for students to participate in community-based internships. Block scheduling facilitated student-student and student-teacher relationships and there was an ease among students and teachers. The academic orientation around student participation was in parallel with a range of extracurricular activities in which students were participants and leaders.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are the vehicles through which organizational structures, policies, and practices come alive in the day-to-day life of young people and adults in schools. Change relied on strong relationships, and those relationships in many schools are currently strained.

SUPPORTS: CAPACITY-ORIENTATION TOWARD ADULTS AND STUDENTS. One of the key supportive strategies we identified for challenging punitive school discipline was for leadership to hold capacity orientations for both students and adults. In these school systems, leaders recognized the growth potential in members of the school community, regardless of age or position, and took responsibility for creating the educative and supportive environments that nurtured growth. In these school systems, implementation of alternative discipline approaches involved teaching and supporting adults on campus to reflect upon and improve their practices.

A school district administrator described this capacity-orientation toward school site staff at the district level, which created opportunities for experimentation and leadership at the school site:

“I’m going to mention here that I think our district has done this a little different than a lot of places in that I will not direct it from top down that you will do this. I said, ‘Look at what they’re doing. Get subs for your teachers, take your teachers over to the campus. Let their teachers talk to your teachers. You guys work it out,’ because we have built this more from the ground up instead of the top down. It’s a change of culture, and you have to have them on board. Everybody’s got to be on board with this. My personal view is if I dictate this to schools, we’re not going to be as successful with it, and so we’ve built this from a ground-up model.

The district is, ‘We’ll support it.’ We’re putting money into this. We’re giving them release time or paying them to work with other sites because we believe in it. I can tell you right now, the staff has to build the plan. They have to build what they want to do. It’s their thing.”

Our school observations confirmed that the teachers and school leaders worked together to learn and implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). It was one of the schools in which we found the fullest implementation of PBIS in our sample.

School leaders who held capacity-orientations toward adults and students spoke about the adults on their campuses as respected colleagues, provided opportunities for teachers to meet in groups to make decisions, and extended the system of positive or restorative discipline to adults. An administrator describes this approach to leadership:

“Yesterday’s staff meeting, for example, I said, ‘Hey teachers. I visited 12 classrooms yesterday. A lot of the kids are using headphones and earbuds, so, ‘Turn and talk to your neighbor next to you. I’m going to give you two minutes. Go for it. Talk. You want that engagement. What are we hearing? Why are we allowing kids on their cell phone? What solution do you have? Well, to a teacher who’s saying, ‘I’m struggling with it,’ we’re all family here. How are you struggling with that? We’re going to help you. So, all of a sudden, I saw a few teachers coming up to her at the end of the meeting, ‘Okay, let me help you.’ That’s how we do it.”

We found consistently in our case studies that in schools that had moved furthest away from punishment and exclusion, school leadership held both capacity-orientations toward staff and students.

SUPPORTS: STUDENT LEADERSHIP, VOICE, AND ORGANIZING CREATED VIBRANT SCHOOL COMMUNITIES.

Schools that fostered adult-student and student relationships through student leadership, development, and organizing had strong school cultures with a sense of cohesiveness, ease, and purpose with which students moved through the school day. This deepened when teachers provided opportunities to voice opinions and demonstrate leadership in classrooms.

In schools with numerous student clubs and activities, students reported having multiple opportunities to explore their interests. They felt free to pursue their interests, and adults acted to support their interests. In these schools, students were proud of their schools. This sentiment was particularly salient in schools in under-resourced communities where students adamantly expressed that their school's public, negative reputation did not align with their experience in the school. While students held multiple and insightful critiques of their school, they were also generally happy with their experience, primarily because they felt supported by available activities and by adults to participate in activities that interested them.

In terms of student voice, students described a range of opportunities for participation and leadership, whereas opportunities for student voice and influence over school policies and practices were more limited. Youth organizing was primarily held by community grassroots organizations who worked with a teacher partner on school sites to hold meetings at the schools. Student reports of current organizing activities largely discussed district-level policy, although interviews with adult allies identified school-site issues addressed by student-led campaigns.

The majority of adults that students identified as supportive were adults they had built relationships with through extracurricular activities. As a sponsor for a club or activity, teachers reported engaging with students around issues beyond academics which allowed students to demonstrate and develop a different set of skills. Teachers also stepped into different roles beyond pushing content. In these adult-student spaces, both student and teacher had the opportunity to develop a relationship outside the classroom.

In one ninth grade team and in several classrooms in other regions of the state, teachers taught in an explicitly Freirean teaching philosophy known as critical pedagogy.⁵⁰ In these classrooms, teachers built strong student-teacher relationships and interrogated power within their classroom curriculum. One teacher shares:

“You question power in the classroom, and you do everything you can; you recognize your power, but you also do everything you can to create these horizontal relationships of power.”

Students learn to understand their own history and question authority through personal migration stories and critical history units that put historical figures on trial. The teacher also recognizes that to be consistent with this type of curriculum, they need to teach in ways that share power with students.

Healthy, equitable relationships among and between adults and young people help move schools in positive directions and flourish within structures that are designed to foster them. The possibility of a relationship is always available in school spaces, but given the many demands of schools, school structures must be designed intentionally to foreground relationship building and nurturing.

OBSTACLES: STRAINED ADULT RELATIONSHIPS. In our data, relationships mediated the impact of alternative programs to discipline in key ways vis-à-vis adults and young people. Research points to the key role that teachers play in policy implementation. Our data suggest that years of top-down policies have harmed relationships and created distrust and resistance to change. Teachers who resisted largely agreed with the spirit of the reforms but disagreed with the implementation, seeing it as the newest wave of top-down mandates. In schools with the most resistance, teachers opposed an overall loss of autonomy including mandated and scripted curriculum, a lack of transparency of how administrators were handling discipline, and autocratic leadership styles.

There were a variety of reasons for the tension between the administration and teachers. Some of the tension traced back to the leader and whether they had capacity-orientation toward adults. For example, in one high school in the Central Valley, in the principal's first year — the year before restorative justice was initiated — he announced that he was changing the culture of the school from “an adult-centered” culture to “a student-centered” culture, and communicated the message that the needs of the teachers would no longer be of central concern. Many teachers felt disrespected and insulted by the principal's policies and priorities and by his treatment of them. The glaring disparity between the positive and supportive alternatives to punishment teachers were being asked to implement and how these initiatives were introduced created a situation primed for resentment and resistance.

OBSTACLES: TEACHERS' STRAINED RELATIONSHIP TO TEACHING. As described in other parts of the report, teachers in many of the schools we studied faced contradictory pressures that had, over years, eroded their joy of teaching. Drastic budget cuts, large class sizes, pressures to cover content that would be tested on state standardized tests, and new mandates on how to manage their classrooms strained teachers' relationships towards the profession of teaching.

Teachers felt a profound loss of autonomy over teaching, pulling them away from sharing their passions with their students:

“I wanted to teach computer animation to students that want to learn and it's fun. They turned me into a prison guard. They turned me into a babysitter who's supposed to be a psychologist and a prison guard, because I don't wanna force kids to be here, it's kinda like saying, “I'm gonna force you to go to Disneyland.”

Teachers also reported not feeling supported by school leaders not only in discipline issues but in their efforts to provide high-quality instruction to students. At one high school in Los Angeles, a teacher explicitly identifies the feeling of being disrespected that fuels his rejection of restorative justice. He recalls administrators using arguments like, “Don't you care about kids?” or “I see some of you don't want to work hard for your kids, not like me.” The teacher explains that these sorts of arguments used to pressure him into practicing Restorative Justice pushed him away from it.

When relationships between adults are weak or fractured, it is difficult for change to take hold. We found that most schools did not have the capacity or culture around collective action. In many of these schools, especially in large comprehensive schools, teachers and staff worked in isolation. Adults did not share a sense of collective responsibility around the interests of young people, and teachers and staff were left to fend for themselves. Without a collective of adults dedicated to working out what alternative approaches to discipline meaningfully look like in the classroom and across the school, a few isolated individuals shouldered these programs. Lack of structures and cultures around collaborations ensured that alternative programs remained idiosyncratic and peculiar to the individual teacher, rather than something that a collective whole could achieve.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

1. **Flatten hierarchies.** There were opportunities for adults to build strong, collaborative relationships with one another through teacher teams, school leadership teams, and collaboration time.

2. **Foster adult relationships.** Schools with discipline systems that fell in the educative or liberatory quadrant were characterized by equitable relationships among adults fostered through school structures that deliberately created spaces for adults to build relationships with one another.

3. **Expect and treat teachers as professionals.** In these schools, treating teachers as professionals was characterized by 1) trust in teacher expertise in matters related to the classroom, 2) flexibility in implementation so that teachers could modify and adjust school practices and policies to the needs of their classroom, and 3) confidence in administrator support when necessary.

5. **Develop robust student activities and youth organizing opportunities.** Schools that fostered adult-student relationships and student relationships through student leadership, development, and organizing had stronger school cultures. Opportunities for student leadership, development, and organizing are not foregone conclusions at the high school level and even less so at middle schools. As a result, our research team observed the role of student activities in the life of the school.

4. **Create collaboration time.** Some schools dedicated time, resources, and infrastructure to foster teacher collaboration around content and pedagogy. This occurred in multiple forms such as: organizing high schools around grade-level houses and aligning curriculum across content areas; protecting time within the school day for department meetings, and for teachers to meet and discuss pedagogy and content; co-locating grade-level or subject-matter teachers in close proximity; and offering opportunities and paying for substitutes to support teacher interests via professional development.

In these ways, schools increased teachers' capacity to interact both in the day-to-day work of teaching and planning and to think through teaching and learning issues. In schools characterized by structures that allowed for teacher collaboration and leadership, teachers reportedly shared responsibility for their students' academic and social well-being in meaningful ways with their colleagues.

IDENTITY, IDEOLOGIES, AND DEEP-SEATED BELIEFS

Prior research on teacher engagement with educational policies suggests that a teacher's response to a policy is largely determined by the degree of congruence between the policy's demands for change in practice, and a teachers' own identity and ideology (or people's deep-seated beliefs about who they are in society vis-à-vis others). While these deep-seated values are shaped by a person's social position, such as class, race, gender, ability and disability, they can also be influenced and changed through education, professional preparation, and on-going workplace experiences.⁵¹

This research highlights that shifting identity and ideologies is critical, particularly when attempting to change discipline practices, but is also difficult to achieve. Discipline practices derive from both conscious choices and less conscious beliefs, values, and habits that often reach back to an individual's childhood. Discipline practices touch upon individual notions of good versus bad, implicit and explicit racial biases inherent in our society, and even an educator's understanding of their role.

As a whole, a majority of teachers and staff at schools in our study held capacity-perspectives of students. They shared a belief in the possibility of education to prepare young people to become successful adults, in whatever ways they defined success, whether as holding a job, contributing to society, or realizing their dreams. Discipline for a majority of teachers was about the rules and routines they created so most students could accomplish the assigned work and about how to respond to students they believed broke these rules and routines and made it difficult for the rest of the students to accomplish work.

OBSTACLES: DEFICIT-ORIENTATIONS TOWARD STUDENTS.

In practice, we found that in many schools, regardless of the overall climate, some students were disproportionately excluded or punished. For example, in many of the large comprehensive schools in our sample, the research team experienced campuses and classrooms to be safe and supportive for a majority of the students. Simultaneously, the research team collected observational, interview, or focus group data that suggested some students were deemed to be less educable, and thus were sent out of class, roamed the halls, and sat in in-school suspension rooms. Some of the adults we interviewed and even some of the students in our focus groups expressed deficit-based and racist narratives about other students and families to justify exclusion and punishment. We found this to be more true for three groups of students in certain school contexts: 1) Black students when they comprised a small minority of a school campus (approximately 10%); 2) Indigenous students, especially those associated with living on a reservation; and 3) Latinx students in the Central Valley considered to be gang members.

OBSTACLES: POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (PBIS) STRENGTHENS DEFICIT-NARRATIVES OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.

These deep-seated beliefs took slightly different forms and prevalence at different schools, suggesting potential strategies for shifting them. As we described above, the choice of alternative discipline approaches (i.e., whether PBIS or RJ) often corresponded to more or less dominance of deficit-oriented ideologies within a school community. We found deficit-based narratives among adults to be more prevalent in schools that adopted PBIS and Character Education, suggesting that staff with these beliefs resonated more with these reforms or that these disciplinary approaches strengthened these narratives in schools.

For example, in one of the middle schools where PBIS was most institutionalized, adults would explain that parents don't teach students how to use the bathroom "so we march them in there and teach them at the beginning of every year." In this school, students were expected to walk and eat lunch in same-gendered single file lines, and parents who attended school events were taught not to stamp their feet, yell out, or clap other than at the end of a song. We also found in some schools, adults evoked trauma language in ways that furthered or justified exclusion.

SUPPORTS: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CHALLENGED DEFICIT-NARRATIVES OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES. Beyond finding fewer instances of deficit-based narratives in schools that adopted restorative justice, we found evidence from teacher interviews that restorative practices challenged pre-conceived notions and humanized the "other." These occurred primarily through harm circles and community-building circles where adults gained more understanding and empathy, and strengthened their commitment to students through dialogue. Teachers reported that RJ circles and community building activities helped them understand students' backgrounds and lives, and form a more nuanced understanding of the challenges they faced outside of school. A teacher said that RJ had "once again reaffirmed that it's important to view our students as humans."

Another teacher shared:

"So, with restorative justice, that refocused me ... and I started doing these community circles, then I started noticing a connection with the students that I had but not as big. That connection started growing more and more, and I started seeing students care more about them trying to do well. Even with some of the students that in the beginning of the year were a bit more difficult and were basically kind of shutting down, they started opening up, and in doing so, either they, they don't necessarily go from an F to an A or a B. It went from an F to a high D or to a C. Those students started showing that, you know something, I can open myself up a little more and show that I care."

Educators across school settings (i.e., region, school type, etc.) who participated in RJ circles shared these personally transformative moments that they experienced. The one exception to this trend was the experience of teachers in one comprehensive school that adopted restorative justice as a part of a district implementation plan, which had ongoing tensions between administration and staff. In this school, the district employed the RJ coordinator who only learned about restorative justice after receiving the position. Overall, teachers who participated in RJ activities felt they gained a deeper understanding of their students. In some instances, teachers shared that they began to feel more invested in students' success.

SUPPORTS: EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS INFLUENCED TEACHER DEEP-SEATED BELIEFS. We also found some evidence that educator preparation programs were important to support the development of student-centered, restorative, and capacity-oriented ideologies in different regions of the state. In particular, we found evidence that Fresno Pacific University and the University of California, Los Angeles' Principal Leadership Institute and teacher education programs supported the preparation of leaders and educators in their regions that practiced these values. This evidence suggests that teacher and leadership preparation programs influence and affirm educators' commitment to racial justice, capacity-orientation toward adults and children, and non-hierarchical forms of teaching and leading, thus providing possibilities for strengthening teacher beliefs and values that challenge punishment, exclusion, and control.

SUPPORTS: TEACHERS, LEADERS AND OTHER ADULTS OF COLOR OFTEN SUPPORTED MORE CAPACITY-ORIENTED NARRATIVES OF STUDENTS. Finally, we found that teachers, leaders, and other adults of color and educators who identified with the community that students came from, tended to hold more asset-based perspectives of students and families and were instrumental in shifting school culture. At times these were principals who set a tone for the school or teachers who created supportive and demanding classroom environments; at other times, these were other adults on campus that acted as key supports for students. However, this was not universal. We also observed educators of color who treated students kindly but seemed to have given up on teaching. For example, in one classroom, a veteran teacher of color pleaded with students to do a book activity explaining, "they are saying we need to do this."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SHIFTING IDENTITY, IDEOLOGIES, & DEEP-SEATED BELIEFS

1. **Build with educator and leadership preparation programs and pipelines that challenge deficit-oriented narratives of students and communities.** Educator preparation programs were critical for preparing educators to teach and lead in ways that moved schools away from punishment and social control and towards more educative and liberatory practices. These programs provided teachers and leaders with opportunities to reflect on their own identity, ideologies, and deep-seated beliefs; develop root-cause or structural analysis of academic disparities and the role of schools in reproducing or challenging social inequalities; and practice concrete tools to interrupt these cycles.

2. **Hire in ways that reflect the local community served by a school.** Districts and schools created a range of academic and non-academic positions and hired adults of color into these positions who identified with the community served. Schools that did this well created academic mentor or other student support roles and filled them with college graduates from the local area who matched the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the student body.

3. **Examine the foundational beliefs and assumptions of programs and interventions before adopting them and adopt those that foster asset- or capacity-oriented beliefs about children and communities.** PBIS tended to coincide and/or strengthen deficit-narratives of students and families, while restorative justice had the potential in some schools to challenge them.

LARGER SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Finally, our research reminded us that schools are only one institution within a larger society, and those larger social structures continue to impact the efforts within schools to move away from punishment.

OBSTACLES: LARGER NARRATIVES OF LAW AND ORDER STILL DOMINATE. We found in almost all of our focal schools, situated within a society where violence, fear, exclusion, and punishment dominate much of public policy and political discourse, both children and adults could not necessarily imagine a school without punishment. Students and adults often asked for more punishment and exclusion as an answer to instances of disengagement, disaffection, and conflict. When asked in focus groups what students don't get in trouble for, but perhaps should, students frequently responded with disrespecting teachers, talking in class, and smoking in bathrooms. A majority of students voiced a desire for teachers to respond more harshly to kids causing trouble. What did not come out of student focus groups was any commentary on the quality or content of teaching and learning in these classrooms where students caused the trouble. In classrooms, we often observed painfully rote regurgitation of information (i.e., copying down notes from the board, writing dictated texts, cutting and pasting content from the internet), and teachers who had largely given up on teaching (i.e., assigning a computer assignment and allowing free time, allowing students to watch videos and make TikTok videos in the back of class, handing out a worksheet without instructions and spending most of the class period berating students for not completing it).

Similarly, we found that on matters of school policing, only one educator in all of our data suggested that police do not belong in schools.

Instead, a majority of teachers shared that they never engaged with school police but believed that police provided a sense of safety on the campus. Interviews and student focus groups support the notion that police were mostly known on campus for their police car parked in front and the occasional handshake and hello. Our data also demonstrate that in instances where educators or students shared experiences of actual encounters with police, police often escalated encounters with students and resorted to violence. For example, one teacher describes calling in security to calm a student down, and the police handcuffed and removed the student. In another example, an argument with a student who jumped a school fence resulted in charges of assault on a police officer.

Some members of school communities continue to hold on tight to more punitive and exclusionary approaches and see the present changes as going too far in the opposite direction.

"You could kind of go too far with this as well. What I mean by that is, knowing that we're not going to kick any students out, it's almost like, I can do whatever I want. We still have to be able to make examples out of students, so that everybody else can kind of fall in line. Honestly, I think students need the structure, they need the discipline. Even coming from a coaching perspective, we're disciplined. I don't really know what's happening with education, but now we have a lot of young teachers that the theory is not really matching the practice. 'We don't need officers in school. We don't need a dean. We will handle everything.' Mm-mm (negative). We still need to have an officer on campus."

As a six-year, grant-funded restorative justice position ended in a school, this administrator returned to his former position as the dean of students, returning the school to a more punitive approach.

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District insolvency and drastic budget cuts created a sense of fear, instability, and devaluation among school staff, which often undercut any attempt by either school administrators or other teams of educators to ask more of teachers.

OBSTACLES: LIMITED STATE BUDGETS HAVE HIT CLASSROOMS HARD AND CONSTRAIN ALTERNATIVES TO PUNISHMENT. In a significant number of focal schools, particularly in urban areas of the state, district budgets created significant obstacles to creating supportive schools. Numerous districts where our focal schools were, experienced double-digit multimillion-dollar deficits during the time of our study. These budget deficits led to threats of insolvency, drastic cuts to personnel and programs, layoff notices to all new and some seasoned teachers, increases in class sizes — and in some districts to teachers “selling back” class periods designed for teachers to prepare for classes, collaborate with others, call parents, or meet with students. These districts tended to be in locales where median household incomes were often as low as \$25,000 per year.

These financial constraints diminished or destroyed programs that were hard-fought to initiate. In one of the schools, with evidence of some of the more sustained implementation of restorative justice, budget cuts led to reduced peer restorative justice class periods. As a result, students sent out of class by teachers who would have been sent to a peer mentor and a teacher experienced in restorative justice practices, were instead sent to an in-school suspension room. In another school in their sixth year of restorative justice practice, cuts resulted in the termination of a restorative justice position and the return of a dean of students into the role of primary disciplinarian.

District insolvency and drastic budget cuts created a sense of fear, instability, and devaluation among school staff, which often undercut any attempt by either school administrators or other teams of educators to ask more of teachers. For example, in a school where teachers expressed positive feelings toward restorative justice and shared concrete examples of how RJ community-building circles engendered more empathy and investment in their students, teachers dug in their heels and opposed the creation of advisory classes. Advisory classes were successfully used in other schools to build a sense of community within the advisory, build stronger advisor-student and advisor-parent relationships, and create a space for restorative justice circles and other curricula to support students.

Facing larger class sizes and fewer opportunities for collaboration or preparation, teachers simply did not have the bandwidth to try something new and do it well. One educator explains:

“When class sizes go up, teachers have a harder time implementing, using the restorative practices lens in their classroom. They don’t feel like they have the time and resources, nor are they getting the support from outside staff to enable them to do it. So, I think the human resources part is ... I know you asked not to talk about money, but it’s like ... that’s partly what makes an impediment. Not that you don’t have somebody who can do it. It’s just if you don’t do it well, it doesn’t feel like a good thing to do.”

As we have mentioned in other parts of the report, a majority of teachers genuinely agreed that restorative justice and other forms of non-punitive discipline were aligned to their values, and even that they’ve had some success with them, but they lacked the time and the resources to do it well. In these cases, teachers reverted to calling administrators to remove students from their classrooms and felt frustrated when students returned to class with the same behaviors.

OBSTACLES: WITHIN DISTRICTS, SCHOOL SEGREGATION UNDER-RESOURCES “BLACK” AND “INDIGENOUS” SCHOOLS. Third, we found stark segregation of educational opportunities in many districts. In most focal schools, administrators, teachers, and students clearly expressed a shared understanding about whether theirs was a favored or unfavored school in the district. Administrators and teachers described how school districts segregate students into schools and concentrate resources — like new facilities, experienced teachers, and effective leadership — in the schools serving more privileged students.

These stark differences in educational opportunity within school districts were most visible in districts serving a sizable number of either Black or Indigenous students. We found less evidence of these practices in the Central Valley region of the state. In the Central Valley school districts, where student racial and income demographics were much more homogeneously Latinx and lower-income, we did not observe much stratification between comprehensive schools. However, we found stratification in the Central Valley between comprehensive schools and their system of alternative education facilities.

SUPPORTS: LOCAL COMMUNITY-EDUCATOR-ADVOCATE ORGANIZING EFFORTS CHALLENGE LARGER SOCIAL INEQUALITIES. In adult and youth organizing that built power within communities and schools and challenged larger social structures like unequal funding or demanded the re-allocation of resources from police and military to student support services, there were authentic relationships between community-based organizations, parents, and educators, and the co-creation of vibrant schools. Teachers in these schools considered community and parent organizations to be key drivers of change. One teacher stated:

“I see value in them funding these organizations and the importance of them continuing to fund them. Because overall, it’s been a positive thing to have all these different service providers on our campus. They’re very grounded — those are the right people that need to be in those places. They have critical lenses and are doing really important work. They’re providing mentorship to our kids. And we need, like our students, need adult mentors who can guide them.”

Community organizations also built relationships with particular educators within the school to support the organizing efforts against truancy tickets. A teacher explains the insider-outsider partnerships and the organizing work he and his students engaged in.

“And so, what started happening next was we started holding after-school meetings in my classroom with attorneys from Public Counsel and the Community Rights Campaign also had their own attorney. And so, I had parents coming in and they were crying, they were like, ‘I don’t know how I’m going to pay for the rent, how I’m going to put food on the table. I’m going to have to miss work because I gotta go to court.’ And so, we intensified the organizing and they started collecting data, and it was something like over 2,000 tickets and they didn’t want to release where all this money was being channeled for the last 10 years. And so, we decided that we were going to start a Taking Action club on campus. So, our first members were the kids that were ticketed. They became organizers and activists. And so, the organizers came in and we would meet after-school and they would train them. Even Patrisse, one of the founders from Black Lives Matter at that time, she used to work for the Community Rights Campaign. She was also coming in, and we’re getting kids from the South Side and the East Side together and doing trainings and organizing them.”

These teachers acted as important hubs for student leadership and activism on campus and continued to educate in transformative ways in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN LIGHT OF LARGER SOCIAL CONTEXTS

1. Recognize that educational justice is part of a larger movement for racial and economic justice and is not a substitute for it. Education reform is often promised as a delayed solution to urgent racial and economic injustices.⁵² Those organizations most effective in transforming schools are those that build power within communities; target larger social problems such as resource reallocation, militarization, and racist policing; and participate in insider-outsider strategies that engage activist educators in community campaigns for racial and economic justice. ◆

THE ROLE OF CORE FUNDERS

What has been the role of The California Endowment in these efforts?

Responding and contributing to a convergence of interests around criminal justice and school discipline reform during the Great Recession, The California Endowment (TCE) became a key anchor funder for school discipline reform in California. The role of the California Endowment in these efforts has been multi-faceted and has appeared to evolve in ways that are responsive to the honest feedback and lessons shared by grantees, particularly grassroots grantees, over the years. From our extensive data that provide a 'look up' from school systems that have been the targets of the school discipline reform, we find evidence that the most important influence of TCE in the school discipline reform arena has been:

1. Funding organizations and a convergence of interests that worked to pass, and in a few cases, implement new school discipline policies at the state and local levels;

2. Facilitating a communications effort that contributed to what has become the dominant school discipline narrative among school leaders in California, that suspensions are not working to change student misbehaviors and alternatives are necessary;

3. Spotighting and advocating restorative justice as an alternative to punishment and exclusion in the state; and

4. Contributing to the expansion of the restorative justice field. and local levels;

FUNDING THE TRANSLATION OF INTEREST CONVERGENCE INTO STATE & LOCAL POLICY

Review of previous TCE reports that describe TCE's advocacy and policy efforts in more detail, the timeline of these state efforts, along with interviews with community-based organization leaders collected within this study, suggests that a similar interest convergence of law enforcement and school-to-prison pipeline activists occurred in California, and nationally, to initiate many of the state policy impacts.⁵³ While organizing and advocacy efforts to challenge the school-to-prison pipeline began as early as 2001,

with important local wins, policy changes only began to occur in 2007 as the Great Recession strained the government and criminal justice budgets.

The Endowment played a significant role in bringing these two interests together, including funding the first meeting between grassroots organizations and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national organization of "police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and violence survivors in 2011."⁵⁴

It is important to note that though they were celebrated as a broad coalition, each group represented very different constituents and had varying analyses and motivations for change.

We organize these distinctions below.

LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATIONS (E.G., FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS • COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA)	CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS (E.G., CHILDREN NOW)	GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS (E.G., CADRE, LABOR STRATEGY CENTER, OAKLAND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, THE BLACK ORGANIZING PROJECT)
<p>[1] WHO: Police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and violence survivors.</p>	<p>WHO: Policy researchers and advocates.</p>	<p>WHO: BIPOC led parent, community, and youth organizing groups.</p>
<p>[2] MISSION: Engages law enforcement, military, business, faith and sports leaders who promote evidence-based policies and programs that enable kids to be healthy, well-educated, and prepared for productive lives.</p>	<p>MISSION: To support and contribute to a powerful, unified voice for kids dedicated to ensuring all California children reach their potential.</p>	<p>E.g., MISSION(S): CADRE is a South LA community-based, independent, parent-led organization that makes parent power a strong, organized, and permanent force to be reckoned with: changing the perception and treatment of South LA parents; countering racism towards South LA parents; and protecting the civil and human rights of South LA parents and their families, especially their right to dignity, education, and participation</p>
<p>[3] PROBLEM FRAME: Suspensions contributed to crime by leaving kids unsupervised and out of school during daytime hours.</p>	<p>PROBLEM FRAME: Suspensions led to lower attendance, chronic absence, and reduced learning time.</p>	<p>PROBLEM FRAME: Suspension and expulsion policies, and policing practices target Black and Latinx students, who are being pushed out of school. These are two of many racial economic issues to address through power-building.</p>

The Endowment was instrumental in quickly bringing together legal advocates like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Public Counsel to draft legislation. While youth and parent organizing groups noted that they had very little input into the legislative process (“to be very candid — it was pretty much made up of top-down groups” and “we were nervous that it would be a top-down thing where they just called on us when they need young people to work the halls”), grassroots groups organized scores of young people to speak out in Sacramento and lobby individual legislators.

As part of the statewide advocacy efforts, TCE funded the polling of likely voters on perspectives of school discipline and created a communications strategy that framed school discipline reform to be about fixing the unintended consequences of a well-intentioned policy (zero-tolerance) and the “need for an alternative approach emphasizing prevention and holding youth accountable for their behavior and helping them learn from their mistakes.” Policy advocates integrated this frame into the advocacy and media strategies that influenced policymakers to pass AB 420, banning willful defiance, even as numerous other policies championed by this coalition failed to pass.

This framing of the purpose and need for school discipline reform became concretized and subsequently echoed by district and school leaders.

The pressure to shift youth supervision from police back to schools was also occurring at the local level, absent TCE involvement, suggesting that this was a convergence of interests in many places. For example, in one of our case studies, school and community interviewees described that in response to budget cuts to juvenile justice, a local coalition between a church-affiliated neighborhood watch group, the county sheriff’s office, and a local Mennonite University peace-building program created a restorative justice partnership between police and schools that later became a model for the region.

We discuss in the findings that this restorative justice model likely provided important de-criminalization pathways in juvenile justice.

However, the practice of this restorative justice model in schools appeared to expand police-school partnerships for police purposes.

TCE’s Building Healthy Communities (BHC) strategy that was place-based and included the maintenance of local organizational hubs continued to fund organizations that led school discipline efforts, and resulted in the passage of numerous district policies.⁵⁵ Important local funding strategies also evolved to include funding of collaborations beyond a particular BHC. In one such case, the Brothers, Sons, Selves coalition supported the coordination of a communications and advocacy strategy that resulted in the largest school district in the state passing the School Climate Bill of Rights.

From the school-level data, the impact of these policies on the day-to-day efforts to move away from punishment and exclusion are complex and not easy to disentangle. As discussed in our findings, school district leaders in our focal schools were universally aware of state policy changes, particularly, the message that suspensions were disfavored as the tool for addressing student misbehavior. However, evidenced by the dramatic decline in suspensions in the year immediately after the 2011–12 academic school year, the collection and reporting of school discipline data appear to have the largest impact on school suspension rates.

There was less evidence that local school policies had concrete impacts that we could trace at this time. In one district, the local policy was celebrated for creating an additional administrative position in the district central office bureaucracy, but it was filled with someone who had little organizational power or influence to touch schools.

While there is potential that this position could mature over time, it appeared quite isolated because it was a position the community advocated for but then hired and supervised by the institution itself. In another district in which a restorative justice school policy was passed and the district was funded to launch a pilot program, the limited funding — just one RJ coordinator for three days for a school of more than 1,800 students

— meant that teachers generally experienced the policy as top-down and the district staff was not only new to restorative justice, but new to the school itself.

FACILITATING THE CREATION OF A DOMINANT POLICY FRAME

The largest policy impact that we found was that school leaders echoed the dominant framing of school discipline reform as addressing the over-use of suspensions and finding an alternative for addressing student misbehaviors. This framing tended to focus school leaders and teachers on “implementing a program” like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or restorative justice (RJ), and if and when these programs did not result in immediate change in behavior, on finding alternative places to hold students who would otherwise have been suspended — such as sending students to in-school suspension and detention rooms, allowing students to roam the halls, keeping students in classrooms so long as they remained seated and quiet, or keeping students in chaotic classrooms.

Thus, our study finds a range of exclusionary to educative disciplinary practices present on school campuses. As a whole, most schools’ positive or restorative approaches were added on and practiced alongside punitive and exclusionary practices. We also found that schools with sizable, sustained funding for alternatives to punishment saw fuller implementation of alternative practices. We often observed the same practices in schools without any additional funding, except that students were removed to in-school suspension or detention rooms.

Generally, we found that certain aspects of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), an approach derived from special education, achieved stronger institutionalization over time than restorative justice. PBIS’ focus on student misbehaviors aligns more with the dominant policy message and the dominant tendencies in schools toward social control and order. The Department of Education federally recognizes and funds PBIS more than other programs, leading to a great deal of organizational infrastructure. PBIS implementation strategies that suggest the creation of school climate and culture teams, teacher leadership of these teams, and continuous cycles of inquiry and improvement are consistent with the professional practices of educators; and RJ requires an investment of time, emotion, skill-building, and mentoring that most teachers in our current educational system do not have. Creating organizational conditions, such as collaboration time, sustained training, and others, are critical for further institutionalizing alternatives to punishment. These findings suggest a need to focus on the implementation and institutionalization of strategies that engage teachers in future efforts to strengthen supportive school climates and cultures that do not focus primarily on social control.

Finally, this dominant policy frame ignored the fact that those students that received a disproportionate amount of exclusion and punishment were the children of the most marginalized communities in any particular region. We generally found that Black and Indigenous students were disproportionately suspended, expelled, left to roam, left to sleep, and stopped by school police. We also found that in a number of predominantly Latinx schools, where few, if any, Black and Indigenous students were enrolled, school systems expelled, punished, and deemed unrestorable Latinx students, often assumed to be gang members.

[O]ur study finds a range of exclusionary to educative disciplinary practices present on school campuses. As a whole, most schools’ positive or restorative approaches were added on and practiced alongside punitive and exclusionary practices.

We found that the intentionally race-blind school discipline reform policy and the adoption of alternatives to suspensions that didn't acknowledge underlying racialized patterns of exclusion, punishment, and disinvestment, left these practices largely intact. Thus, once schools ended universal and untargeted suspensions, such as tardy sweeps and suspensions for missing detention, targeted suspensions continued. The failure of Proposition 16 in 2020 to repeal Proposition 209, which prohibited race-conscious social policies in California, demonstrates the persistent racism and unwillingness to acknowledge racism within the California populace.

The dominant policy frame arising from the convergence of interests also ignored the systematic disinvestment and extraction in poor communities of color. In historically "Black" or "Indigenous" schools, or schools that served a sizable Black or Indigenous student population and were in historically Black neighborhoods or American Indian Reservations, we found that permissive and apathetic school cultures failed to serve Black, Indigenous, and often newcomer groups located on these campuses.

However, rather than the individualized racism that seemed to drive racially disproportionate school outcomes in schools serving some Black and Indigenous students, systematic disinvestment, budget cuts, layoffs, and constant threats of school closure relegated these entire schools to a state of exclusion and punishment. Moreover, these schools were in communities that had been subject to decades of state-imposed violence and poverty, whether as a product of redlining, proximity to unhealthy industries, and hyper-criminalization, or violent displacement from tribal lands, depletion of natural resources, and forced erasure of traditional cultural ways. We observed adults that seemed almost as punished and excluded as the young people. In these cases, anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity were more systemic than interpersonal.

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Framing the problem as student misbehavior failed to acknowledge the intense trauma of poverty, exclusion, violence, criminalization, and policing that existed in these communities, and the ways that school district funding and staffing decisions perpetuated these inequities.

Framing the problem as student misbehavior failed to acknowledge the intense trauma of poverty, exclusion, violence, criminalization, and policing that existed in these communities, and the ways that school district funding and staffing decisions perpetuated these inequities. The failure of Proposition 15, an effort to repeal the anti-tax proposition, Proposition 13, and secure, up-to-date commercial property taxes from large businesses located in the state perpetuate the public disinvestment in schools serving the most marginalized students. These reforms and others, supported widely by educators, are key foundational efforts that would impact the most marginalized schools in ways that current reforms focusing on school suspensions alone could not.

SPOTLIGHTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AS ALTERNATIVE TO PUNISHMENT AND EXCLUSION

One of The California Endowment's most influential contributions to school discipline reform in California has been the spotlighting of restorative justice as a somewhat more community-derived alternative to punishment and exclusion. Despite Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) enjoying significantly more federal recognition and funding, restorative justice has become one of California's most prominent alternatives to punishment and exclusion. By prominent, we mean that many schools adopted RJ in some form and that district leaders often shared that they were doing restorative justice or planning to do it.

We attribute the prominence of restorative justice in California, at least in part, to the funding strategies of TCE. Some of these funding strategies included a restorative justice pilot project at Cole Middle School and the case study of that project. The Endowment also created a Central Valley School Discipline competitive grants program, which included an explanation of restorative justice, thus igniting curiosity among district administrators in the Central Valley. Additionally, many of the local policies won by TCE-funded coalitions include clauses supporting the adoption of restorative justice as an alternative to punishment. Our data suggest that the use of restorative justice during statewide youth organizer convenings strengthened the commitment of local organizers to restorative justice because they experienced the transformative potential to deepen reflection, build community, and unlearn unhealthy internalized oppressions. They returned from experiencing these talking circles, wanting to implement them in schools as ways to build community and empathy across teacher-student relationships.

Finally, BHC funding of restorative justice positions, training, and district initiatives supported the experimentation of restorative justice within schools. Many of these programs became models for other schools, even as they experienced implementation and sustainability challenges.

Our findings suggest that TCE’s spotlighting of restorative justice provided more educative means for addressing school discipline in schools that adopted it and, at times, depending on the underlying principles

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In contrast, restorative justice models that explicitly acknowledged the racial and economic injustices in communities and schools, and practiced restorative justice to heal, build relationships, and challenge these injustices, had the potential to shift schools toward more educative, democratic, and liberatory educational processes.

and values of the restorative justice model adopted, strengthened democratic participation and liberatory possibilities. A wide range of restorative justice models supported the movement of schools toward more educative means of school discipline because through the process of harm circles, students learned from their mistakes and, through community circles and community agreements, teachers and students learned more about each other and their common expectations for the classroom. Conflict mediation or criminal justice derived models of restorative justice tended to emphasize the goal of students learning from their mistakes, demonstrating remorse, and paying restitution. While these models of restorative justice resulted in more educative means for addressing misbehavior, the primary purpose was to conform students to existing classroom and school rules.

In contrast, restorative justice models that explicitly acknowledged the racial and economic injustices in communities and schools, and practiced restorative justice to heal, build relationships, and challenge these injustices, had the potential to shift schools toward more educative, democratic, and liberatory educational processes. In practice, these restorative justice models were more committed to flattening hierarchies between teachers and students, between administrators and teachers, and between teachers and staff; facilitating dialogue across differences; and encouraging critical thought to transform injustices. Thus, TCE’s funding and support of these models of restorative justice spurred the growth of these tendencies in several BHC school districts and beyond.

In the findings, we describe that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), in contrast, aligned with existing tendencies toward social control in schools. Thus PBIS often became “the carrot” dangled before “the stick” in schools that adopted PBIS. Additionally, PBIS attempted to monetize good behavior and learning — an aspect of PBIS that most teachers tended to resist.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE EXPANSION OF THE RJ MARKET

The multipronged TCE funding strategies brought attention and increased demand for restorative justice practitioners, leading to the expansion and growth of the restorative justice provider market. The data suggest that this has had some positive and negative effects.

The expansion of the restorative justice provider market led to the visibility and growth of restorative justice practices and provided a career pathway for restorative justice practitioners in non-profit community-based organizations and schools. It also led to the development of certificate programs and the incorporation of certification into a limited number of university educator preparation programs. This has likely led to more capacity, knowledge, and expertise in this area. Additionally, we found that the spread of restorative justice in schools and school districts beyond districts in BHC has been partially due to the reputation and marketing of TCE-funded restorative justice trainers.

Unfortunately, along with the market expansion, there is evidence of districts opening restorative justice positions and hiring individuals with no restorative justice experience and who had to learn on the job. We also found evidence that given financial constraints and the sudden availability of funding to restorative justice, some organizations who did not previously practice restorative justice began offering restorative justice trainings. While these individuals had good intentions, there was evidence that implementation of restorative justice was not as strong in schools trained in this way because many of the underlying philosophies and nuanced practices were absent in a rush to create restorative justice programs in schools. Additionally, we found that this new restorative justice industry responded to the needs and desires of institutions and created different models that,

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Restorative conversations, reflection sheets, and apology as restoration are some of the many superficial practices that have been inspired or distorted in the process of attempting to institutionalize restorative justice in schools.

at times, met the immediate desires of teachers to remove and elicit remorse from students but did not further the more transformative potential of restorative justice. Restorative conversations, reflection sheets, and apology as restoration are some of the many superficial practices that have been inspired or distorted in the process of attempting to institutionalize restorative justice in schools.⁵⁶

Again, the expansion of the market of restorative justice providers also tended to further race-blind and a-critical models of restorative justice practices, which, even when implemented well, did not challenge the co-existence of restorative justice and racially disproportionate punishment and exclusion. For example, dress code enforcement in many schools remains racially and gender-biased. Although students, particularly young Black women in many schools, expressed rules against ripped jeans and over-exposure (crop tops, showing shoulders, short skirts, etc.) were unfairly enforced upon them, a-critical forms of restorative justice in these schools deemed these infractions to be outside their purview since there was no “conflict” per se and often little remorse. Young women were made to sit in detention and in-school suspension rooms for the entire day or until their parents brought a change of clothes.

THE IMPACT OF LOCAL ORGANIZING PRESSURES VARIED REGIONALLY

The study suggests that the core BHC strategy of funding local coalitions of community-based organizations to pass local school board policies and hold school districts accountable for these reforms evidenced regional differences. The evidence of this strategy's influence was most visible in two Southern California schools that sustained partnerships between schools and parent and youth organizing groups and shifted the school climate and culture in tangible ways. In one school, a parent organizing group attended a series of staff meetings of a school, initially bringing food, and then subsequently sharing their desires for teachers to use restorative justice in their classrooms. Teachers and administrators referred to this strategy as critical in building relationships between parents and teachers and investing teachers in attempting restorative justice.

In another Southern California school, a community-based organizing group sustained parent and youth power-building efforts by first targeting the school itself to end the most egregious forms of punishment and stratification: tardy sweeps and military recruiters. Then, once the organization won those battles, members began to advocate for a multimillion-dollar renovation of a historically disinvested neighborhood school. These efforts translated into a vibrant parent's center inside the school, youth organizing clubs, and a mutual respect between school leaders and community-based organization leaders. School leaders recognized the importance of community support for securing more resources for the school. Similarly, community activists recognized the importance of not just targeting educators to change their behaviors, but of redistributing resources to under-resourced schools.

In the Central Valley, we found very little evidence of community-based advocacy efforts directly influencing school efforts to move away from punishment and

exclusion. Legal cases, top-down district policies, and external community groups were rarely mentioned or discussed by district or school leaders. In fact, when asked specifically about community organizations, most school leaders in the Central Valley spoke about police, law enforcement, and local agribusiness as the most prominent community partners. The one exception was one mention of the advocacy of the Black Parallel School Board in Sacramento against having school police. State policy and accountability appeared to be the largest catalyst for many of the Central Valley schools. Education preparation programs and universities, such as Fresno Pacific and Sacramento State, and County Offices of Education had a much larger impact on the alternatives being practiced in schools in this region.

In Northern California, we found that the influence of The Endowment's funding strategies differed depending on the complexity of the organizational ecosystem surrounding a school. In several cities where TCE was just one of many funders resourcing into a complex ecosystem of educational organization, schools were inundated with community partnerships — each organization with its own interests, grant deliverables, and programs. We found these services uncoordinated with one another or with the core of teaching and learning in the schools. In more rural areas in Northern California, the institutional actors experienced the development of advocacy organizations as outsiders applying pressure. However, we found evidence that as uncomfortable as this pressure may have been for "insiders," the attention on Indigenous students created some opportunities for district cultural awareness and education programs, an American Indian afterschool program, and an acknowledgement of the failure of the school system.



CONCLUSION

When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of these reforms, the better question perhaps is, for whom?

Examining our findings and data through this question suggest that the implementation of school discipline reform in California over the past decade led to uneven success depending on which problem you hoped to solve:

1. The need to shift supervision authority over young people back to schools during a time of declining law enforcement budgets;
2. The loss of instructional time for young people; or
3. The over and racially disproportionate criminalization and targeting of BIPOC youth, particularly those most marginalized.

Ultimately, the interest convergence best served the goals of law enforcement groups represented by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; moderately served the goals articulated by children advocacy groups like Children NOW; and was least effective in furthering grassroots organizations' goals of racial and economic justice in schools, or students and parents' desires for more humanizing school institutions.

The outcome of interest convergence was effective in shifting the responsibility of supervising youth back to schools. As we describe in detail, dramatic and immediate decreases in suspensions kept more kids within the school building and off the streets.

Administrators frequently describe the early years of this reform as 'okay, we need to stop suspending them. Now, what are we going to do?' Those students who would have been suspended were now in school and the legal responsibility of school administrators.

Through the advocacy and implementation of this interest convergence, police-school partnerships remained strong and became stronger, particularly in the Central Valley. In all but one school we visited throughout the state, we found favorable descriptions of school-police partnerships. We found evidence that those partnerships were expanding in the Central Valley, particularly through restorative justice partnerships.

The temporary interest convergence also moderately improved instructional time since students were not suspended from school. As evidenced in our findings, schools ended the most draconian uses of suspensions like tardy sweeps and escalation of missed detentions. These impacts are significant because a number of these students recovered instructional time. However, as evidenced in our findings, schools have continued to find new and creative ways to hold students within the school building without necessarily providing them with quality instructional time.

Partially this is due to educators not being exposed to or taking up the deeper "Why?" of school discipline reform, especially ideas about decriminalization, racially discriminatory discipline, or parents' desires to make schools more culturally and racially inclusive for their children. Educators largely understood school discipline reforms to be about reducing suspensions for academic

purposes or implementing a new program. Educators were rarely asked to confront the deeper “Why?” of these reforms or asked to construct solutions.

As a result, there is little evidence that the reforms addressed grassroots activists’ deeper concern that students, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latinx, were excluded from meaningful learning. The evidence suggests that in a sizable minority of schools in our sample, students were sent to in-school suspension rooms. This was prevalent and growing in the Central Valley at the time of this study. In schools not using in-school suspension rooms (more often in Northern and Southern California), we found that loss of instruction was still occurring but through different means. Teachers sent students out of class or permitted students to roam the hallways, creating the widespread adult concern over “walkers” and “roamers,” many of whom researchers observed to be Black and Latinx. The prevalence of “walkers” and “roamers” raise questions not only about teachers sending students out of class, but point to concerns about rigor and relevancy in classroom instruction such that students choose the hallway rather than the classroom. In other schools, where security or administrators effectively patrolled hallways, students were “in class” but in classrooms that were either chaotic (no students were learning) or neatly divided between those participating in the lesson and those allowed to watch videos, talk, or sleep undisturbed.

Thus, while squarely benefitting school budgets by raising Average Daily Attendance, many students, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students have not realized improved educational experiences.

We found that in most instances, the policy changes (i.e., ending suspensions and adopting PBIS/RJ) did not account for the deeper patterns of anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and anti-gang practices and beliefs that worked differently in schools depending on the historical and present relationship with those communities. Without explicit race-conscious solutions or targeted efforts to challenge racism in schools serving a minority of Black and Indigenous students,

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[W]ithout a significant redistribution of financial and human resources to historically Black or Indigenous schools, mandates not to suspend students translated to permissive

these schools continued to exclude, punish, and make Black and Indigenous students feel unwelcome.

Similarly, without a significant redistribution of financial and human resources to historically Black or Indigenous schools, mandates not to suspend students translated to permissive and apathetic adult cultures, as many adults seemed to give up. In these schools, pockets of great teaching were surrounded and eclipsed by chaotic classrooms and hallways. The majority Black, newcomer, Latinx, and Indigenous students in these schools experienced disjointed and disorganized lessons, long-term substitute teachers, irregular bell schedules, high teacher turnover, and high leadership turnover. Moreover, most local policies targeted the schools themselves, demonizing the educators within historically Black and Indigenous schools rather than the school district mechanisms that perpetuated the marginalization of these schools within the district. For example, in the school district serving a sizable Indigenous student population, a lawsuit brought against the district for racially disparate academic and disciplinary outcomes for Indigenous students resulted in the closure of the middle school on the reservation and the dispersal of students to local charter and city schools far away. Although after-school resources were brought to the new school, Indigenous students were not well-served, and few, if any, Indigenous teachers or adults were employed.

While arguably a product of pragmatic policymaking, five years of case study data across the 34 participating schools suggest that recent school discipline reforms in the state benefit law enforcement, criminal justice, the state legislature, and school budgets most. Black, Indigenous, and Latinx youth remain actively subject to the carceral logics of our imagined change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A coordinated strategy that champions a more explicit structural racial justice analysis in relation to school climate and discipline reform. This strategy must explicitly counter the legacy of racial segregation and disinvestment in Black, Indigenous, and newcomer communities by investing in schools and community-based organizations in these communities. The strategy must also challenge current school district policies and practices related to funding, attendance, and personnel that exacerbate existing income and racial inequalities within school districts. Finally, the strategy must support efforts to target and provide alternatives to racist notions perpetuated in schools including deficit-narratives of students and families and racialized notions of safety.

2. A coordinated strategy that begins with an unflinching analysis of how schools, police, the criminal justice system, and other social service agencies form a continuous and interdependent youth control complex or school-prison nexus that encloses youth of color, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latinx “gang-affiliated” youth in California.⁵⁷ While these systems may act or appear to act to support and protect youth, they do so by identifying, surveilling, harassing, and criminalizing a subsection of the population in any community, often creating both the process and justification for the eventual exclusion of these young people from society.

3. A coordinated strategy that treats educators as movement actors, not just movement targets. Teachers and administrators were essential to the success of each of the institutionalization efforts. Where they were strongest, they were well prepared in more restorative approaches through their educator preparation program, aligned discipline to critical pedagogies or leadership philosophies, belonged to wider networks of educators, and were funded to experiment with and share their solutions with others. Teachers, repeatedly targeted, are giving up, with detrimental consequences for young people in schools.

4. A coordinated strategy that continues to strengthen the capacity of multi-generational community-organizing to analyze the social and economic conditions impacting youth and work collectively with parents, youth, and educators to improve them. Locally grounded community organizations are critical to identifying and challenging political, economic, and social injustice. Strong regional and statewide networks of these organizations can support skill-building, analysis, power-building, and coordination.

5. A coordinated strategy that takes advantage of the existing institutional supports within schools for moving school climate, culture, and discipline away from punishment and social control. For example, assistant principals, who have traditionally acted as the dean of students or disciplinarian, have become much more prominent as potential movers and shakers. These positions would be ideal for individuals with deep youth development, youth empowerment, and restorative justice expertise. Coordinated strategies to create new training opportunities, career pathways, and evolving professional expectations targeted at reframing the traditional role of assistant principals are necessary.

6. A coordinated strategy that demands the redistribution of financial and human resources to the schools pushed to the margins of society by antiquated, racist funding and attendance policies. These schools, within historically Black and Indigenous communities, serve the families of our lowest income students. There are a finite number of these schools in the state and our collective responsibility must be to provide the necessary resources to the students and adults in these schools.

If we have learned anything from the past decade, it is that racial, income, and geographic disparities, not to mention environmental stressors, have reached explosive levels in the United States. Young people, born into this time, rely on schools, in part, to prepare them for their future. What society are we educating and disciplining youth to participate in? We can educate our youth to participate in a society that murders Black people with impunity, hoards vaccines during a global pandemic, and defines life trajectories by a young person's race, class, and ZIP code at birth. Or we can educate our youth to build and contribute to a society where each person thrives. What this might look like is a practice of radical imagination that we allude to in the front cover and detail in the Brightspots Brief included in this report's addendum (pp. 92 - 98). ◆

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BEYOND SUSPENSION DECLINE: A NORTH STAR FOR SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

What does education for collective liberation look, feel, and sound like? In a time when it has (once again) been made clear that our institutions of economy, safety, education, and health are serving some and disposing of others, we must refuse “tinkering with utopia”⁵⁸ and instead rebuild schools by pulling out the roots of the problem and planting the seeds of joy, trust, and imagination.⁵⁹ Yes, this is hard work. But we are heartened by the knowledge that education for collective liberation is not a lofty, abstract goal. This knowledge comes from our research which demonstrates over and over again that educators, young people, parents, and community members all over California are working to enact their dreams and visions of an educational experience that moves us toward collective freedom.

This appendix has been written so you can imagine how education for collective liberation might look, feel, and sound like as you sit in classrooms bustling with the energy of learning, walk through hallways crowded with displays of student expression, and chat with young people and adults who are thriving in their relationships with each other and working together to reimagine their school, community, and society.

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Drawing from this study’s observation and interview data, we quilt together glimpses of what education for collective liberation could be. Each data point is followed by the school pseudonym code as a reminder that this data is drawn from interviews and observations from schools all over California. The data used in this brief reminds us that the way forward is already here — in classrooms, relationships, aspects of school culture across the state. The primary report contains a full discussion of the obstacles that make these bright spots of transformative education exceptions and not the norm. We hope that this brief, in describing the bright spots, lights possible ways forward.

BUILT SPACE. This school has been built to center the academic and social lives of young people and the adults coaching them into adulthood. Walking on to the school campus, the large grassy areas surrounding the school give a sense of openness, serenity, and space (ALT 6). Grass patches and trees dot the campus where students relax and socialize with each other and teachers hold outdoor classes on sunny days (SC 1). The entrance to the main building is a two-story atrium that gives a sense of expansiveness as natural light fills the large open space (NC2).

All available wall space, inside and outside, celebrate the activities and aspirations of young people. The murals and student art, prominently featured throughout the school, visually root students in a community legacy of resistance and social change spearheaded by previous generations; embrace and celebrate the wide spectrum of student interests and identities; and imagine a future made possible through education and activism. On the outside of buildings in the center of campus, the power of young people’s collective action is ever-present through a commemorative plaque and murals of student walkouts in the 1960s, protesting unequal educational opportunities for the working-class community of color the school serves. These murals are daily reminders of the capacity and necessity for young people to challenge the unfair social conditions and demand something better for

themselves and their communities (SC 2). The hallways are lined with impressive student artwork including a ceramic Medusa head, a Marvel comic book drawing in color pencil, a black and white print of a skull in an army helmet, an acrylic painting of a leopard in a tree, and a detailed pencil drawing of an Aztec king. The artwork, expressing students' cultures and diverse interests, have pride of place (CV 6).

Another hallway is painted floor to ceiling with images of people from different cultures and historical time periods, reflecting the diversity of the school community. They are working and smiling, superimposed on vibrant backgrounds of space and nature. Walking down the hallway, it feels as if you are moving through a portal between the current and an alternate reality where all people are in harmony with each other, nature, earth, and space (NC 2).

At the end of this hallway is a place where the seeds of that alternate reality are being planted and nurtured — a thriving student health center that attends to the mental, physical, spiritual, and community dimensions of students' well-being (NC 2). While there are enclosed rooms for private physical health check-ups, one-on-one counseling sessions, and restorative and counseling circles, the main room is large with cubicles with low walls so social and mental health workers and interns can see and interact with each other. The cubicle design was intentionally selected to foster relationships — the open-concept facilitates health center employees' conversations with each other and with students as they walk in. A huge whiteboard in the back of the main room displays the weekly calendar of events as well as available staff. Physical, mental, and social health issues are not hidden behind closed doors but can be out in the open and held together in community, between adults and young people. Softly lit, a large adjacent room with a couch area, a small table, and exercise equipment is for students, parents, and staff to use as a lunch room, meeting room, or a quiet room for rest (NC 1, CV 6)

Posters of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian community leaders feature prominently on the walls and in the personal cubicles of health center employees. Other posters celebrating all racial, ethnic, and gender identities announce the health center as a space where students are welcomed to be their most authentic selves. Near the entrance, a bulletin board advertises available medical and mental health services as well as youth leadership opportunities. Another board neatly shares pictures of all health center employees, a rainbow of smiling faces. Underneath this board is an altar that holds pictures of family members, students, and friends that have died and small mementos. All aspects of students' lives - dental health, advocacy opportunities, the death of loved ones - are recognized in this space.

Classrooms are large with unobstructed windows that fill the space with sunlight (NC 2). Classroom layouts vary and are flexible and responsive to teacher and student needs and as well as the requirements of academic work. Arrangements prioritizing student interaction and autonomy prevail. Students have room to walk around without bumping into furniture or each other. In one class, students are sprawled out with their group projects spread across the floor and on different counters in the room with arts and crafts materials all around them (CV 10). In another class, the curtains are drawn and the overhead lights are off. Instead, students journal by the warm glow of table lamps and string lights around the room as the soothing sounds of water bubbling in a small fountain fills the room (NC 1). Several classrooms take on a coffee-shop atmosphere with tables and chairs of different heights and shapes as well as lounge chairs and sofas. Students choose the workspace that they feel best accommodates their own preference and the academic task on hand (ALT 6).

Almost all classrooms are equipped with technology such as smart board projectors that display documents, artifacts, and work while students and teachers maintain conversation and eye contact.

For example, we see one teacher projecting cards that students have illustrated with various images. Students

yell out the Japanese word for the image as the teacher maintains a steady, engaged conversation with students that bounces from correcting pronunciation, praise and encouragement, and friendly chatter (NC 2).

The school welcomes all members of the surrounding community with space for parents and family members as well. A classroom has been repurposed for and dedicated to caretakers. It is brightly decorated with information about the school and options for post-secondary education. In the corner, is a table with a coffee maker, electric tea kettle, and a refrigerator to hold food and refreshment for the multiple parent meetings that occur throughout the day and late into the night to accommodate the caretakers' various schedules (SC 2). Attached to this room is the all purpose room with exercise equipment that the school has made available for parent use (CV 6).

TEACHING AND LEARNING. Educator and student creativity and curiosities thrive in classrooms that nurture students' intellectual and socio-emotional development. In a set of paired-classrooms, we encounter two teachers of the same grade level who have autonomy over the design of their classrooms and schedules. Rather than subjecting learning to a fixed bell schedule, teachers have created an integrated curriculum that gives students the time to delve deeply into projects. At present, the students are engrossed in creating stop-motion videos of different biomes. The music of learning swells and quiets as students excitedly discuss next steps and quietly concentrate to bring their ideas to life. While the teacher helps with technical difficulties and poses questions to encourage student curiosity and connect to subject content, it is clear that the students are the main drivers of work and activity in this classroom (NC 7).

While the label of "extracurricular" for vocational, media, and visual and performing arts classes often implies they are outside the necessary course of academic study, at this school, extracurriculars are seen as essential to a rigorous academic program that offer opportunities for students to explore all types of

intelligences and interests. Thus, extracurriculars are resourced equal to academic subject matter through investment of classroom built space; appropriate, cutting-edge equipment; and dedicated full-time faculty.

The investments are clearly evident in a large multi-media and digital arts computer lab, a visual arts room teeming with supplies and half-finished masterpieces, a professional performance arts theater, and a wood-paneled courtroom used to practice speech and debate. The school prides itself for having an expansive dance studio, with floor-to-ceiling windows that frame the outside trees. A long wall of mirrors with a barre is the focal point of the room. On this day, students and teacher gather around to watch a recording of a recent practice session and discuss strengths and areas of improvement of each group performance. At the end of class, the teacher announces that some of the groups have been selected for a prestigious dance performance. The bell rings and the students pour out of the studio, celebrate and excitedly congratulate each other. "I'm going to call my mom and tell her," one student exclaims. Another student laughs as she tells another classmate about the many people she is texting with this good news. Student pride and delight in achievement is commonplace (NC 2).

Care for the social, emotional, and intellectual well being of students is embedded in the everyday interactions among students and between students and adults that make up school life. For example, at the student health center, we are warmly greeted by the office manager. We see him acknowledging each and every student that walks by or enters the health center. He follows up his greeting with a question, making it clear that he knows and cares about the life of each young person.

Students explore making decisions for their well-being in class as well. In one class, we see a teacher noticing a restless student who is trying to engage the attention of his peers. The teacher describes the action, commenting "I see you're distracted", and then asks if the student needs a break. The student is initially

unsure; a classmate chimes in — “He needs a break!” The student agrees and he goes to the back of the room to the break space, a cozy corner with couches, pillows, and a rug. He plops down on the well-loved couch and looks through the variety of gadgets, quiet games, and books neatly organized and available for students to use when they need a break or need some help in calming down. We observe the student demonstrate responsibility for his break by beginning a sand timer. He spends his time focused on fiddling with a fidget spinner. He quietly moves back to his seat when time is up (ELEM 1).

Curricular iterations over the years have moved teaching and learning closer and closer to a school-wide vision of education for collective freedom. The school originally began with the goal of preparing young people to be capable and contributing citizens and workers. Film, digital arts, engineering, health, and law career pathways connected classroom learning to major industries in the city and created smaller learning communities that reduced anonymity in a large school and promoted teacher collaboration (SC 1).

Curriculum in each of these pathways include learning about the power imbalances and injustices that shape both their personal lives and broader society. The 9th

grade ethnic studies course, which is a graduation requirement, illustrates how teachers braid curriculum, student supports, and discipline together. The grade-level team includes the restorative justice coordinator so that community-building and healing circles are core to the content and classroom culture and climate (SC 2). Students are supported as they strengthen their capacities to critique, and transform the world through collective healing and collective action.

Over the span of a school year, students explore their personal histories and values within the context of a historical narrative that centers the histories of Indigenous peoples in America. Close collaboration with the restorative justice coordinator has prepared teachers to hold space for when issues arise, given the complex and difficult truths of these topics. A teacher recalls a classroom discussion in which it became clear that many students had experiences of tremendous loss and death in their lives. Rather than moving on to new curricular content, the teacher continued the conversation in circle. The classroom is a place where trauma and grief can be held together in community. In this way, many of the conflicts that arise between students or between adults and students due to disrespect or unnamed trauma are replaced with

Students are supported as they strengthen their capacities to critique, and transform the world through collective healing and collective action.

trusting, generous relationships that make space for the messiness of life. And when conflicts occur, as they inevitably do, teachers use harm circles so that students repair their relationship with each other as they work to expose and remedy the harm.

At the same time, the students apply these same skills with their academic work. The harm circle comes to play in a culminating question about “Who (or what) is responsible for the genocide of the Taíno?”⁶⁰ As they debate how to answer this question in ways that embody the restorative justice values that they have practiced with each other in their own community-building and harm circles, students exercise and demonstrate high levels of critical thinking.

The curriculum also nurtures students’ imagination as they examine the resistance and resilience of groups that have experienced systematic oppression in the US. Students practice their own acts of resilience and reimagination through conducting participatory action research projects that interrogate issues they see in their own neighborhoods and communities. In their study of history, students strengthen academic and social skills as they become historical actors themselves, working to transform the conditions of their community.

Along with a critical reading of the world, the school ensures relevant and purposeful academic content by grounding skills in the day-to-day of local community life. Reflecting student and teacher intellectual curiosities and interests, classrooms buzz with learning ranging from DNA replication to literary character analysis to the neutering and docking of the tail of the school’s pet baby goat (ALT 6). Much of teaching and learning center around supporting students’ stewardship of the land. Students build and maintain a small farm and conduct tours of the local redwood grove, both of which are popular field trips for the district’s elementary school students. Students serve as peer mentors as they share their knowledge of local plant life and sustainable farming skills with the rapt elementary school students. These field trips build

relationships across schools and communities, as made clear by the wall full of enthusiastic thank-you cards and posters created by the younger ones.

STUDENT VOICE AND LEADERSHIP. Student leadership in self-expression and collective transformation is integral to the vitality of school culture. We see student interests, talents, and concerns for the world are the lifeblood of the school. The school’s main quad is alive with the activity of students busily setting up for a student clubs and culture fair that brings together racial and ethnic affinity group organizations that celebrate identity, history, and culture, and interest-group clubs like anime and video games. On a large stage featured prominently in the center of the quad, a school administrator and a dozen or so students participate in an elaborate Polynesian dance. Student booths designed and operated by students run along the perimeter (SC 1).

The critical consciousness developed in the 9th grade ethnic studies curriculum fosters students’ sense of responsibility for school transformation through school-wide campaigns. These campaigns emphasized students’ inherent value through programming that reflected slogans such as #YouAreBeautiful (SC 2). The restorative justice coordinator ensured that the diversity of the students was reflected in the campaigns by working with the special education teacher to include students with autism as part of the student leadership of the campaign. The RJ coordinator also enlisted parents to make butterflies with the slogan #YouAreBeautiful that were posted all over the school and handed out to students.

Teachers and community partners work in partnership. Curriculum that foregrounds the work of community organizing in social change comes alive when teachers encourage and inform students of organizing activities. Community organizers work with students to investigate issues between and across schools to build solidarity and identify campaigns that will benefit the community beyond school walls. Historically, the campaigns have successfully challenged random

backpack searches; removed the presence of military recruiters; and implemented district-wide policies to ban suspensions of willful defiance and affirm the necessity of a school climate and culture that centered relational ways of nurturing student safety (SC 2).

DISCIPLINE. There is no need for police or security guards as the foundation of school culture and climate is rooted in restorative justice values which distribute the work of safety, care, and well-being across all members of the school community (CV 12).

In this school, educators fuel students' intrinsic self-discipline through learning that is active and relevant to students' lives. When learning is meaningful, students draw from their own resources of discipline to wrestle with challenging and relevant academic content, and meet goals they have set for themselves or believe in. The teacher serves as coach and guide to coax students to their learning edges, provide the tools and resources to bolster nascent skills and competencies, and create the classroom conditions that encourage experimentation and exploration (ALT 6, NC 6, CV 6).

Maintaining trusting relationships are critical to the liberatory education practiced in this school. Teachers engage with students respectfully and with care even when students are disruptive or off task. During a read aloud in one classroom, we observe several students off task, talking about their interactions with another classroom teacher. The teacher stands next to the table of four boys and tells one student to stop and follow along in the book. Another student at the table asks the teacher, "Miss. Do you think it's disrespectful to say 'Calm down,' to a teacher" to which the teacher answers, "Yes, I think it is disrespectful to say that to a teacher. But you need to talk to her. You can't hold it all in. If there's an issue you need to work it out with her." Teachers, young and old, respond similarly to students (CV 6).

The work of building relationships over time recognizes mistakes, missteps, and failures as inherent to a life-long approach to learning. As such, no student or adult is disposable in this school (CV 6).

Restorative justice is not isolated to one room or held by one coordinator; it is part of the daily life of the school and undergirds relationships between adults and students, among students, and among adults. For example, we observe a facilitated conversation between a teacher and a student which reveals that a student was being disruptive in class because he had already mastered the work and was bored. Through respectful discussion, the student comes to understand the negative impact of his behavior on both the teacher and his classmates and takes responsibility for his actions. The student and teacher work out an agreement that in future situations when the student completes his work before other students he will be allowed to use his laptop to study (CV 6).

Students also turn to restorative justice to resolve conflicts. In another example, we see two students, involved in a scuffle, come to the restorative justice coordinator, red-faced and angry. The counselor speaks to each of them separately, listens to their respective renditions of the facts, and calms them down. He then brings them together for a restorative conversation that reveals the underlying issues leading to the fight and works out an agreement to avoid future misunderstandings. Information that comes to light during the discussion about challenges facing one of the students enables a referral to a mental health professional as well (CV 6).

Adults too are given the space to make mistakes and given the resources to try again. The school leader shares with us a story about a teacher struggling in his classroom. In a thoughtful and intentional conversation,

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There is no need for police or security guards as the foundation of school culture and climate is rooted in restorative justice values which distribute the work of safety, care, and well-being across all members of the school community

the school leader and the teacher honestly discuss his challenges and then develops a year-long coaching and professional development plan to address areas of improvement (CV 12). In this way, restorative justice drives school culture change.

Its “efficacy” is measured by the transformation of a young person’s educational experience rather than fidelity to an implementation plan (CV 12). In allowing restorative justice to fundamentally transform how adults interact with each other, schooling becomes a means toward an education that humanizes all members of the school community rather than the accomplishment of the narrow set of academic and social standards that have too long been used to erase, marginalize, and dispose of the students (and the adults) who do not meet them.

ADULT LEADERSHIP. Instead of relying on the way “things have always been done”, school leaders at this school have restructured the academic program that centers the margins. Thus, school change and design are guided by the needs and wants of the students who are consistently the most marginalized in school: students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities (SC 2). For example, the principal is working with teachers to detrack English classes beginning with the ninth grade. While this has been met with pushback from the White, Asian, and affluent families, the principal has stayed the course, guided by a vision of a school that celebrates diverse thinking and without academic hierarchies (NC 2).

Professional development of educators is not focused solely on mandated trainings designed and implemented by external “experts”. Instead, professional development is part of the rhythm of school life and embedded into everyday interactions between adults. Teachers have consistent, ample time for collaboration every Wednesday afternoon as a full staff, and again in subject area and grade level teams. Arising from full staff discussions, teams of teachers and staff plan and lead professional development sessions focused on particular issues, including moving the Standards Based grading, integrating English language instruction into all subject areas, and supporting students and families severely impacted by the COVID pandemic (SC 2, NC

1, NC 3, NC 4). In this way, teacher leadership drives improvement in pedagogy and curriculum (NC 1).

Restorative justice values are the foundational norms of professional behavior. This was evident in the implementation of restorative justice as an approach to school discipline. The desire for something different started at the school site with a small group of committed individuals. Taking a bottom-up approach, this small group learned and practiced with restorative justice as they built relationships with interested people at the school site and central office. Thus, the implementation of restorative justice unfolded over several years, took place in partnership with committed individuals at both the central office and school site, and was informed by the school-based experiences of the pilot group (CV 6, CV 2). Professional development on restorative justice focused on the experiential as educators sat in circle with each other learning about the person behind the colleague (SC 2). By moving at the level and pace of relationships, adults began to understand that, as one counselor explained, “restorative [justice] isn’t a thing that you do, it’s a way that you are. It’s how you interact...” (CV 2).

CONCLUSION

This school exists, albeit scattered across the classrooms and hallways of schools in California. This appendix offers not a template but one possible vision of education for collective liberation. The “ideal” school is not a stationary goal that will ever be completed and finished, but imagined, struggled over, and worked out together within the shifting dreams and needs of the whole school community. We hope that this north star lights the flame of your imagination. We thank the young people, parents, community members, educators, staff, and school leaders for their daily movement towards a school where education is a practice of collective liberation. ◆

Characteristics of Participating Comprehensive Middle & High Schools

SCHOOL CODE	REGION	URBANICITY	SCHOOL TYPE	GRADE LEVEL	SCHOOL SIZE	DISTRICT SIZE	STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS*
NC 1	NORTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	850 MEDIUM	32,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SIZABLE BLACK STUDENT POPULATION
NC 2	NORTHERN CA	SUBURBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	1500 LARGE	32,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SIZABLE BLACK STUDENT POPULATION
NC 3	NORTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	850 MEDIUM	49,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SIZABLE BLACK STUDENT POPULATION
NC 4	NORTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	1,100 MEDIUM	57,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS
NC 5	NORTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	6 - 8	550 SMALL	4,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, SIZABLE INDIGENOUS STUDENT POPULATION
NC 6	NORTHERN CA	RURAL	PUBLIC	K - 8	200 SMALL	4,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, SIZABLE INDIGENOUS STUDENT POPULATION
NC 7	NORTHERN CA	SUBURBAN	PUBLIC	K - 8	550 SMALL	4,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, SIZABLE IN-DIGENOUS STUDENT POPULATION
CV 1	CENTRAL VALLEY	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	1750 LARGE	43,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SIZABLE BLACK STUDENT POPULATION
CV 2	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	1,800 LARGE	10,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, FEW BLACK STUDENTS
CV 3	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	6 - 8	600 SMALL	10,000 SMALL	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
CV 4	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	850 MEDIUM	3,500 SMALL	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
CV 5	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	6 - 8	800 MEDIUM	3,500 SMALL	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
CV 6	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	500 SMALL	500 SMALL	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
CV 7	CENTRAL VALLEY	URBAN	PUBLIC	6 - 8	1,000 MEDIUM	9,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS
CV 8	CENTRAL VALLEY	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	1,800 LARGE	73,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS

CV 9	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	3300 LARGE	21,000 MEDIUM	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
CV 10	CENTRAL VALLEY	SUBURBAN	CHARTER	6 - 8	200 SMALL	500 SMALL	DIVERSE, FEW BLACK STUDENTS
CV 11	CENTRAL VALLEY	SUBURBAN	CHARTER	9 - 12	300 SMALL	500 SMALL	DIVERSE, FEW BLACK STUDENTS
CV 12	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PRIVATE	6 - 12	350 SMALL	600 SMALL	N/A
SC 1	SOUTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	2,100 LARGE	72,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS
SC 2	SOUTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	1300 LARGE	600,000 LARGE	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
SC 3	SOUTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	2000 LARGE	600,000 LARGE	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS
SC 4	SOUTHERN CA	URBAN	CHARTER	6 - 8	550 SMALL	600,000 LARGE	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
SC 5	SOUTHERN CA	RURAL	PUBLIC	6 - 8	800 MEDIUM	18,000 MEDIUM	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
SC 6	SOUTHERN CA	URBAN	PUBLIC	9 - 12	2,200 LARGE	120,000 LARGE	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS

Characteristics of Participating Alternative Education Sites

SCHOOL CODE	REGION	URBANICITY	SCHOOL TYPE	GRADE LEVEL	SCHOOL SIZE	DISTRICT SIZE	STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS*
ALT 1	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	6 - 12	60 SMALL	10,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS
ALT 2	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	50 SMALL	500 SMALL	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
ALT 3	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	3 - 8	100 SMALL	9,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, SIZABLE BLACK STUDENT POP
ALT 4	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	250 SMALL	21,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, NO BLACK STUDENTS
ALT 5	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	220 SMALL	21,000 MEDIUM	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX
ALT 6	NORTHERN CA	RURAL	PUBLIC	9 - 12	130 SMALL	4,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, SIZABLE INDIGENOUS STUDENT POP

Additional Elementary Schools Visited

SCHOOL IDENTIFIER	REGION	URBANICITY	SCHOOL TYPE	DISTRICT SIZE	STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS*
ELEM 1	CENTRAL VALLEY	URBAN	PUBLIC	43,000 MEDIUM	DIVERSE, SOME BLACK STUDENTS
ELEM 2	CENTRAL VALLEY	RURAL	PRIVATE	600 SMALL	N/A
ELEM 3	NORTHERN CA	RURAL	PUBLIC	4,000 SMALL	DIVERSE, MAJORITY INDIGENOUS
ELEM 4	SOUTHERN CA	URBAN	CHARTER K - 5	600,000 LARGE	PREDOMINANTLY LATINX

* Our schools were either predominantly Latinx, which we defined as having student bodies of more than 90% Latinx students, or diverse. We defined diverse as having at least two ethnic or racial groups present, with one of those groups being at least 10% of the population or schools with student populations with at least three ethnic or racial groups present, with each of those groups being at least 5%. We found it useful to categorize the “diverse” schools further to describe the presence or absence of Black and Indigenous students, given how policing and suspensions disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous communities. We considered sizable population as enrolling approximately 18 - 20% Black students or 12 - 15% Indigenous students; and some population as enrolling 5 - 10% Black or Indigenous students.

OUR TEAM

[Seenae Chong, Ph.D.](#) is an Assistant Professor in Organizations and Leadership at University of San Francisco, School of Education. Her research focuses broadly on the relationship between schools and communities and how this relationship is leveraged to reproduce or challenge educational inequity. Her research interests and commitments are informed by the relationships she had with young people and their families in her work as a special education teacher and an afterschool provider.

[Mary Louise Frampton, J.D.](#), Emerita Professor and Director of the Aoki Center for Critical Race and Nation Studies at UC Davis Law, challenged discriminatory school practices through civil rights litigation. She currently teaches and studies restorative justice in school and community settings. Frampton contributes her legal and policy expertise to design interventions that can foster equity and inclusion.

[Bianca N. Haro, Ph.D.](#) a feminista-educator-activist, is a first-generation college graduate and daughter of immigrant parents from Guadalajara, Jalisco. Currently, she is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology at Pitzer College. Her research examines the factors that push Latina students out of school. Besides her commitment to research, Bianca is dedicated to organizing with and for Communities of Color. She collaborated with Gente Organizada and the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California to publish the report, Pomona Police Department's Crusade Against Black and Latinx Youth, released in March 2021.

[Jamelia Harris, Ph.D.](#) is an AAUW American Fellow and Robert Curvin Post Doctoral Research Associate at the Joseph C. Cornwall Center at Rutgers University-Newark. Her research is committed to centering the voices and lived experiences of Black girls in the K-12 pipeline and contributes to the current national discourse which calls for a re-centering of Black girls' specific needs in carceral and school system reform. Her professional and scholarly objective is to support stakeholders in gaining a more nuanced understanding of the racial-gender dimensions of educational inequities that are often overlooked in conventional policy, practice, and advocacy discourses toward designing inclusive, supportive, and empowering schooling environments for all students.

Danielle Huddlestun, M.A. is a graduate of the Organization and Leadership Master's program at the University of San Francisco and an academic advisor at the University of California Davis. As a first generation college graduate and advisor, she is committed to providing student-centered support and developing restorative advising practices to challenge systematically inequitable processes and policies at the university. She is particularly passionate about access to support for non-traditional students and students navigating academic probation, and hopes to pursue research in these areas to improve students' academic advising experiences.

Cecelia Jordan, M.A. is currently a doctoral student at University of Texas, Austin College of Education. With nearly a decade of experience integrating culturally relevant pedagogy and restorative justice practices in classrooms of all ages, Cecelia merges circle, song, writing, and oral-storytelling to create transformative experiences amongst Black and Indigenous organizers and leaders of color who are on the frontlines of today's fights for justice.

Danfeng Soto-Vigil Koon, J.D., Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor and Faculty Co-Director of the Transformative School Leadership program in the University of San Francisco's School of Education. Her research focuses on educational law and policy as a site of contestation and explores the ways that education law and policy further or impede efforts to create a more just society. Her passion and commitment to public education are informed by her work as an educator, lawyer, and organizer.

Hoang Pham, M.A., J.D. is a Research & Policy Fellow for the Stanford Center for Racial Justice at Stanford Law School, where he engages in research, policymaking, teaching, and lawyering regarding education equity, public safety, and economic opportunity for Black, Indigenous and other people of color communities. He previously spent 10 years working in education to improve outcomes for low-income students of color—six as an elementary school teacher in South Los Angeles and four as a consultant with the Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning. Hoang graduated from the University of California, Davis School of Law, where he clerked at the National Center for Youth Law and Public Advocates.

Jeremy Prim is currently a Sociology doctoral candidate at the University of California, Davis. His current program of research focuses on the areas of race, education inequality, policing, and school discipline. His dissertation research attempts to understand how mechanisms of the carceral state permeate within schools and the relationship the carceral state has to educational outcomes. Jeremy’s work explores the possibility that at the national level the carceral state exacerbates, at the state level mitigates, and at the local level combats the social reproduction of educational inequality and punishment disproportionality.

Zakiya Scott is a Southern Black queer writer and editor, and communications strategist who believes in the transformative power of storytelling to uproot racist systems, transform culture, and ultimately change the world.

Lawrence Winn, Ph.D., J.D. is an Assistant Professor of Teaching and the Co-Director of the Transformative Justice in Education (TJE) Center in the School of Education at UC Davis. His research explores the role of social, community, cultural, and resistance capital plays in the lives, educational experiences and civic and community engagement of youth and their families. He is a trained qualitative researcher with expertise in community engagement and restorative justice. ◆

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WE THANK ADAM MUSSER,
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TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT.

IN LOVING MEMORY...

This report was completed during an incredibly difficult year(s). We remember our loved ones who passed and celebrate their contributions that we take forward.

Lynette B. Johnson passed away on February 12, 2021. She was a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and a teacher of all ages. She was also my aunt. I met Aunt Lynette when my now wife, Brooklynn, introduced me to her at their annual family reunion in 2014. I immediately felt Aunt Lynette’s warmth and embrace in the Johnson, Kimber, Roberson, Nelson family, with her huge smile and unyielding support, even when asked to perform the difficult task of taking the family photo. Throughout the years, without fail she has continually reminded me that I am loved, even if it’s just telling me how proud she was of an accomplishment. Aunt Lynette’s endless care for others as if everyone was her own family will forever live on in me.

—Hoang Pham

I would like to remember my grandfather, Paul Edward Ransom Kidd. As his only grandson, our bond and relationship was like no other. I miss his physical presence everyday, but I am always reminded of him by his voice. He had many titles throughout his life but his voice was like no other, and pair that with his infectious smile and laugh, you had no choice but to smile. His legacy continues to live on through me and I constantly hear his voice stating that he is proud of me. I love you always and forever Grandpa.

—Jeremy Kidd

In memory of my beloved uncle, Myong-Woo Nam. You were a shining example of humble, diligent service to the most marginalized and oppressed in our society. So many benefitted from your boundless generosity, so many miss your exuberant zest for life (and burritos!). You believed the divine was alive in each and every person you encountered and treated them as such; a world that operates from this fundamental belief is what I’m working toward. I miss you, 고모부.

—Seenae Chong

Taken from us too soon Cameron Simmons was a restorative justice youth leader turned adult mentor, community political educator, artist, son, brother, uncle, new father, grandson and homie. Raised in Deep East Oakland, Cameron embodied unapologetic joy and an organic intellectualism that could make anyone laugh in even the heaviest conversations. Cameron often reminded the rest of us that true justice is not a performance of goodness but a measure of our willingness to get uncomfortable. A village healer and storyteller, you will be missed but not forgotten, this work is both for you and all the people you loved and inspired in our community on the path to liberation.

—Cecelia Jordan

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19. Numbers are based on 2018-19 enrollment numbers from the California Department of Education. Data source: California Department of Education, retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
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