


Providence Public Schools - Student Code of Conduct Policy

 A policy championed by student leaders, organizers, and advocates that increases the use of positive and restorative disciplinary practices in Rhode Island's largest school district

Policy Background

In an effort to reduce suspensions and expulsions in Providence Public Schools and increase the use of restorative practices, high school students working with [Young Voices](#)—a statewide youth leadership and empowerment organization in Rhode Island—spent more than three years advocating for revisions to the district’s [Student Code of Conduct Policy](#).

Young Voices trains and supports young people to carry out research in their schools, collect data with and from their peers, and develop student-led campaigns to advocate for improvements in their schools and communities. Between 2014–2017, student leaders from Young Voices collected and analyzed student-survey data from six Providence high schools learn more about school discipline, held focus groups with more than 200 students, conducted a three-district comparative analysis of discipline practices to determine how they affect the learning environment, and explored disparities in disciplinary enforcement between students of color and their peers.

Ultimately, the students determined that Providence’s discipline code—and its implementation—led to students feeling unwelcome, uncomfortable, and even targeted in their own schools.

The youth leaders also identified restorative practices as a strategy for improving school culture and learning conditions for them and their peers, so they researched how restorative justice worked, how it was being used in other districts, and how it could help to address the problems and mistreatment many students were experiencing. Armed with this knowledge, they met with the city’s municipal and education leaders, developed and presented policy briefs, served on committees tasked with revising Providence’s Student Code of Conduct Policy, and regularly delivered public testimony at the Rhode Island statehouse.

In August 2017, the Providence School Board approved [a new Student Code of Conduct Policy](#), which included [revisions recommended by youth from Young Voices](#). Even with the revised code in place,

youth from Young Voices are still working tirelessly to this day to ensure that the new policies are consistently and equitably implemented in the city's schools.

Policy Language

[EXCERPT]

Restorative Justice

Restorative practices in Providence schools are part of the of the school-based decision-making process and provide a proactive approach for building a school community based on cooperation, empathy, mutual understanding, and respect. Restorative practices hold students accountable for their actions and behavior, while at the same time help create a supportive school environment.

Researchers have cited punitive disciplinary practices as a key element in a “school-to-prison” pipeline, especially for students of color and those with disabilities (other key elements include academic failure and dropout). Researchers have also found alternative disciplinary programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions, school-wide conflict resolution, and cultural responsiveness training reduce the use of suspensions.

PPSD restorative justice practices address student misbehaviors with a focus on repairing harm rather than punishing offenders. The most critical functions of restorative practices are to restore and build relationships. Providence school students, faculty, support staff, and administrators meet with offenders to explore what took place, and to ensure students make necessary amends.

PPSD's approach to restorative practices includes the following:

- Creating learning environments in each school that define expectations for safe, supportive, and orderly school climates.
- Responding to incidents by repairing harm that has been done.
- Bringing people together when relationships are strained.
- Bringing the community together, including those who have been negatively impacted by the behavior, to address the offending behavior collectively.
- Facilitating a common understanding of what the expected behavior is to ensure a higher level of accountability moving forward.
- Ensuring that students have the opportunity to learn self-discipline, to understand the impact of harmful behavior on others, and to be accountable for their actions.

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