



changing disciplinary practices to improve academic outcomes

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

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Exclusionary, punitive practices like out-of-school suspension disproportionately impact male students of color, a nationwide pattern that holds true in Bexar County, Texas. Data links these punitive approaches with challenges in academic achievement, future employment, physical and behavioral health, and income.

In Texas, 83% of Black male students experience exclusionary punishment between seventh and 12th grade. Two Bexar County districts rank among the top 10 Texas public school districts with the biggest racial disparity of instruction lost to out-of-school suspensions.

StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network member UP Partnership is replacing exclusionary discipline with restorative practices. Founded in 2009, the San Antonio-based nonprofit serves as a backbone organization that partners with 500 leaders across eight sectors of early childhood, pre-K-12, postsecondary education, youth development, workforce, justice, funders, corporate partners and local government.

“Essentially, our goal is to replace the school-to-prison

pipeline with the school-to-college pipeline,” said Ryan Lugalía-Hollon, Ph.D., UP Partnership’s CEO. “Our students of color — especially young men of color — are the most likely to be criminalized. When that happens, systems can start to disinvest. And the first disinvestment is not addressing the behavior directly. The opposite of disinvestment is investment. And when we invest in our young people, we create the opposite trajectory.”

rethinking discipline through restorative practice

Restorative practices include ways to mindfully engage with one’s community, create and maintain strong bonds, and proactively build relationships. They are often implemented in the resolution of conflict.

“Through restorative justice, we see people as people — even when they do wrong — and we seek to understand the basis of their behavior,” said Lugalía-Hollon.

In 2019, UP Partnership piloted restorative practic-

es to replace exclusionary policies where possible. The Restorative Practice Collaborative pilot focused on three Bexar County districts. Teachers and staff in these schools underwent a three-day training in restorative justice principles.

UP Partnership developed the program’s infrastructure, including funding, participants, partnership agreements and data-sharing agreements. Throughout the school year, UP Partnership also facilitated high-quality coaching from community partners.

Looking to the data

Over the course of the pilot, the collaborative tracked attendance and discipline data — the two areas with the highest disparities between boys and young men of color and their counterparts. These data points also relate to students’ time in the classroom and as part of their community.

“I think of it as three levels. Level one is, if you’re not in class, you’re not learning. Level two is, if you don’t feel connected to the adults in your environment, then you’re less incentivized to learn. And level three is, how deep is the belonging and inclusion that a young person feels in their school, especially a young person that is more likely to

be criminalized,” said Lugalia-Hollon. “Restorative justice supports each of those levels.”

In the first year, the Judson Independent School District saw dramatic results, particularly in disciplinary incidents. Candlewood Elementary School experienced an immediate decline in September 2019, with incidents measuring at around 29% of recorded incidents from the previous year. That trend continued throughout the year, holding steady at a 70% decline in February 2020.

resilience through COVID-19

Remote learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted data gathering. However, when students returned to schools that implemented restorative justice, both students and faculty were more prepared to build community and resolve inevitable conflict.

“Nationally, as students returned to campus this past fall, there was an increase in conflict. Schools that already had restorative infrastructure in place were at an advantage in navigating that conflict,” said Lugalia-Hollon.

To learn more about the pilot project and its results, visit www.StriveTogether.org.



UP Partnership serves more than 500,000 youth of which 82% are people of color.