Health Justice: New Framework and Findings to Promote School Mental Health

25th Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health

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Welcome!

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Healthier communities for all through equitable laws and policies.
Presenter Disclosure

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There are no relationships to disclose.
Exclusionary school discipline is a public health issue
Health justice + recommendations and opportunities for policy and practice
Restorative justice and mental health in schools
Discussion: answering frequently asked questions
Keep the conversation going
An "Ecosystem" Model

Social and psychological
• E.g., Reduce stress, build peer relationships, and social networks

Socioeconomic
• E.g., Economic stability, access to resources

Health behaviors
• E.g., Increased understanding and advocating for health needs

Physical
• E.g., By age 25, individuals with a high school degree can expect to live 11-15 years longer than those who did not complete high school (Rostron et al., 2010)

ACEs, Toxic Stress & Education

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are “traumatic experiences that can have a profound effect on a child’s developing brain and body with lasting impacts on a person’s health throughout her lifespan.”

Source: Center for Youth Wellness white paper “An Unhealthy Dose of Stress” (June 2013)

Toxic stress is “the extreme, frequent, or extended activation of the body’s stress response without the buffering presence of a supportive adult.”

Source: Center for Youth Wellness white paper “An Unhealthy Dose of Stress” (June 2013)

• Dose response relationship between ACEs and student learning (Grevstad, 2007; Delaney-Black, et al. 2002; Sanger, et al., 2000)

• Inability to regulate behavior or control the expression of emotions (Hertel, 2011)

• Association between chronic absenteeism (a predictive factor for school dropout) and ACEs (Stempe, Bronsert & Allison, 2017)
Exclusionary School Discipline:

Describes any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from their usual educational setting.

Exclusionary School Discipline is a public health issue:

- Deprives students of their education, a critical social determinant of health.
- Feeds into the school-to-prison pipeline.
Exclusionary School Discipline is a Mental Health Issue

- Undermines critical protective factors
- Decreases feelings of school safety
- Impacts psychosocial functioning of students
The Combined Effects

**ACES**
- Unemployment
- High risk behaviors
- Depression and anxiety
- Lower life expectancy
- Chronic absenteeism
- Lower academic outcomes and dropout
- Stress
- Physical illness
- Poverty

**ESD**
- Future disciplinary incidences
- Increased contact with juvenile and criminal justice systems
- Decreased school connectedness

**ACES** and **ESD** overlap, indicating common outcomes such as depression and anxiety, physical illness, and poverty.
Exclusionary school discipline is a public health issue

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Keep the conversation going
What can be done?

Eliminating harmful school discipline policies is a step in the right direction, but it is just one step ...
Health Justice “requires that all persons have the same chance to be free from hazards that jeopardize health, fully participate in society, and access opportunity. Health justice addresses the social determinants of health that result in poor health for individuals and consequential negative outcomes for society at large.” (Benfer, 2015)
What does a health justice approach look like?

4 Key Elements

- Ending discrimination and racial bias
- Prohibiting, amending, or repealing laws adversely affecting health
- Developing primary prevention policies
- Listening to, engaging, and empowering affected communities

Health justice to address mental health in schools

- Ending discrimination and racial bias
- Prohibiting, amending, or repealing laws adversely affecting health

1. Decrease reliance on exclusionary school discipline
Health justice to address mental health in schools

- Developing primary prevention policies
- Listening to, engaging, and empowering affected communities

Scale up mental health and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)
Health justice to address mental health in schools

- Developing primary prevention policies
- Listening to, engaging, and empowering affected communities

3 Prioritize critical protective factors
An effective health justice approach requires ...

Key Takeaways

#1: Decreasing reliance on exclusionary school discipline

#2: Scaling up mental health and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)

#3: Prioritizing critical protective factors
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Restorative Justice in Schools

What is it?

Evans and Vaandering (2016) identified three core components of RJE that inform the implementation of practices and processes: (a) nurturing healthy relationships, (b) building processes that support the repair of harm and the transformation of conflict, and (c) supporting learning environments characterized by justice and equity.

What does restorative justice in schools look like?

3 Tiers of whole school frameworks

- **Tier 1**: Community Building and Relationships (Prevention)
- **Tier 2**: Restorative Responses/Processes for Harm & Conflict (Intervention and Repair)
- **Tier 3**: Supportive Re-entry Supports (Intensive and Individualized)
How does this all fit together?

Understanding the connections between restorative justice and health and wellbeing

#1: Reduces reliance on punitive discipline

#2: Support, development and enhancement of protective health factors
Restorative justice and mental health in *schools*

#1: *Decreased* reliance on exclusionary school discipline

- Augustine et al. (2018) 16% drop in suspensions in K-12 (Pennsylvania)
- Carroll (2017) 50% drop in full-day suspensions for high school students (California)
- Fowler et al. (2016) 63% drop in suspension rate in K-12 (Virginia)
- González (2015) 47% drop in suspension rate; 41% drop for Black students; 54% drop for Latino students (Colorado)
- Gregory et al. (2018) 51% reduction in suspension rate in K-12 (Colorado)
- Hashim et al. (2018) Drop in suspension rates for Black, Latino, Asian, White, disabled, English learner, and free/reduced-price lunch eligible students in K-12 (California)
Restorative justice and mental health in schools

#2: Positive school climate

National School Climate Center defines four essential areas of: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and institutional environment (Cohen, 2013).

Restorative justice and mental health in schools

#3: Enhanced connectedness

- School connectedness
- Peer connectedness
- Familial connectedness
Restorative justice and mental health in schools

#4: Development of social and emotional literacy

➢ Seven-year case study of small urban high school, students identified self-efficacy, conflict resolution skills, and leadership development as outcomes of whole-school RJ practices (González, Sattler, and Buth, 2018)

➢ Two-year ethnographic study with adolescent girls in public urban high school found that restorative circles promoted refined anger management, active listening and interpersonal sensitivity, key aspects of pro-social behavior (Schumacher, 2014)

➢ PK-5 students identified RJ as increasing student-teacher connectedness, self-regulation, self-awareness, and improved peer interactions (Tolefree, 2017)
Key Takeaways

Restorative justice practices and policies as structural health interventions

#1: Decreases reliance on exclusionary school discipline

#2: Enhances protective health and mental health factors

#3: Supports mental health and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)
• Exclusionary school discipline is a public health issue
• Health justice + recommendations and opportunities for policy and practice
• Restorative justice and mental health in schools
• **Discussion: answering frequently asked questions**
• Keep the conversation going
Question 1:
Why is this conversation important in the context of COVID-19?
Response 1:
Why is this conversation important in the context of COVID-19?

- Increased stress and trauma and widening health inequities
- Decreased connectedness
- Punitive school discipline practices are still operating in virtual class settings
- However, there are opportunities for remote positive interventions ....
Question 2:
How can we secure buy-in for schoolwide change?
Response 2:
How can we secure buy-in for schoolwide change?

- Increased protective factors (e.g., school climate and connectedness) and feelings of safety
- Decreased reliance on punitive school discipline practices
- Improved attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, and overall well-being
- Strong return on investment (Belfield et al, 2015)
Question 3:
What can each of us do to create positive change?
Response 3:
What can each of us do to create positive change?

Understand the symptoms of exclusionary school discipline and ACEs

Find out whether exclusionary school discipline exists in your school

Public health and medical communities are key partners

Seek out resources to learn more
Question 4:
Where can we learn more?
Response 4:
Where can we learn more?

For more, visit us at: changelabsolutions.org

Resources:

• The Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality resources and reports

• School Discipline is a Public Health Crisis (Bill of Health digital symposium piece, 2020)

• Defunding School Police Doesn’t Go Far Enough (EdWeek op-ed, 2020)

• School Discipline Practices: A Public Health Crisis and an Opportunity for Reform (ChangeLab Solutions issue brief, 2019)

• Health Equity, School Discipline Reform and Restorative Justice (Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics article, 2019)

• Creating Healthy School Climates (ChangeLab Solutions virtual training series, 2018)
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