



2019  
Partnerships of  
Distinction  
Winner

## A Case Study on The Just Discipline Project

### **GOAL: SUPPORTING POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE WITH RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE PRACTICES**

In 2016, 35% of Allegheny County's public schools reported suspension rates higher than the state average (Huguley, Wang, Monahan, Keane & Koury, 2018). To add to that, Black students were being suspended at seven-times the rate of their non-black peers at schools across the county (Huguley et al., 2018). The Just Discipline Project began in 2017 at Woodland Hills Intermediate to combat this inequity. The goal is to reduce suspensions through the development of a school climate and discipline program using best practices from around the country, including the most promising equity approaches, that is tailored the school.

### **PARTNERSHIP: WOODLAND HILLS INTERMEDIATE TEAMS UP WITH UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH TO IMPLEMENT RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE PRACTICES**

In 2016, the University of Pittsburgh's School of Social Work's Center for Race and Social Problems and the School of Education's Motivation Center began partnering with the Woodland Hills School District to develop and implement a restorative discipline program designed to improve school climate. Planning took place throughout the 2016-2017 school year and the program was implemented in full at Woodland Hills Intermediate starting in the 2017-2018 school year and continues to run to this day.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 28% DECREASE IN STUDENTS RECEIVING SUSPENSIONS AND MORE**

In order to create a restorative discipline practices program to meet Woodland Hills Intermediate's specific needs, teachers from the school worked closely with faculty and staff from the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Race and Social Problems and Motivation Center to design the program. Woodland Hills Intermediate employs a Restorative Practices Coordinator, who is an employee of the Pitt School of Social Work. His role is to ensure the school is equipped with the resources and knowledge to successfully implement the restorative practices model. With the support of a teacher team, who help to lead, support, and advocate for this work, the school utilizes circles and community wide co-curricular events to build positive relationships between students, teachers and families that enhance school climate. These mechanisms also ensure that conflicts and students' disruptions are responded to in an empathetic and growth oriented way, as a way to decrease their future recurrence. This program has proved to be successful and has shown promising results, which were reported in The Just Discipline Project 2 Year Review (2019), including:

- A 28% decrease in the number of students who are suspended
- A 20% decrease in the number of students given office referrals
- A 19% increase in student's feelings of school safety

## MUTUAL BENEFITS

The partnership between the University of Pittsburgh and the Woodland Hills School District brings together researchers who are experts in identifying and organizing best practices around restorative practices with teachers and staff from Woodland Hills Intermediate who can serve as context experts to review, vet and tailor recommendations to fit their district's unique needs. This collaboration not only allows Woodland Hills School District to leverage the University's academic standing to win grant funding that allows this program to operate free of cost to the district, but it also gives Pitt the opportunity to use data to show the program's effectiveness and share with a national audience, raising the institution's profile. All of this comes together to create better outcomes for students in the Woodland Hills School District.

**"Through this multifaceted school climate and discipline program, the Just Discipline Project team work with our principal and teachers to improve the relational quality in the school, and to leverage those relationships to respond more constructively and less punitively to common disciplinary conflicts when they arose...Overall, what we're seeing at the Intermediate School has been wonderfully impactful, and it has served as a programmatic model for what we would like to bring to the rest of the district."**

**- James P. Harris,  
Superintendent  
Woodland Hills School District**

## METHOD: RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

The Just Discipline Project brings the University of Pittsburgh's research expertise to the Woodland Hills School District to partner to solve a problem of practice: decreasing suspensions through the improvement of school climate through the use of restorative discipline practices. This is a great example of a research to practice partnership as it provides a mutually-beneficial collaboration that enables evidence based decision making that will lead to structural change (NNERPP, n.d.).

**WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE  
PARTNERSHIPS?**

**CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES:**

National Network of Education  
Research Practice Partnerships  
Resources (n.d.).

"Building Equity in Research-  
Practice-Partnerships" (Jean, et.al,  
2015).

### References

Huguley, J.P., Wang, M.T., Monahan, K., Keane, G., & Koury, A.J. (2018). Just discipline in Greater Pittsburgh: Local challenges and promising solutions. Pittsburgh, PA: Center on Race and Social Problems. Just Discipline Project. (n.d.). Retrieved August 1, 2019, from <https://pittpacs.pitt.edu/justdiscipline>  
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