



Toronto District School Board

**EFFECTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES ON
SUSPENDED PUPILS' SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT,
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND POST-
SECONDARY DESTINATIONS**

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Executive Summary

A caring, safe, respectful, orderly, and purposeful learning environment in which everyone is engaged and demonstrates personal and social responsibility is essential to student learning. Progressive discipline is the foundation of the caring and safe schools practices at the Toronto District School Board, in which restorative practices have been part of an integrated and proactive approach to address school disciplinary matters for more than twelve school years. To fully understand the short- and long-term impact of restorative practices on suspended/expelled students' school engagement and academic achievement, this study employed student registration, discipline, and achievement data from the past eleven school years as well as demographic data from the Board's unique Student and Parent Censuses.

While the number of suspensions generally declined over time, the proportion of suspensions whereby restorative practices were employed increased steadily, from less than 1% in 2006-07 to 18% in 2016-17. Further analyses revealed that restorative practices had a positive impact on reducing the possibility of students being re-suspended: almost three quarters (73%) of students who had taken part in restorative practices after their first suspension(s) did not have any suspensions in the following school years. This is 6% more than students who had not participated in restorative practices.

While there was no difference in absenteeism rates in the school year when students were first suspended, in the subsequent school years, a greater proportion (7% more) of students who had participated in restorative practices had a very low absenteeism rate (i.e., better school attendance) than students who had not.

Elementary school students who had participated in restorative practices and students who had not participated had similar achievement results in reading, writing, and mathematics in the school year when they were first suspended, and in the following school years, suggesting restorative practices had a very minor or no direct impact on suspended elementary school students' academic achievement.

Tracking students by cohorts in secondary schools revealed that a greater proportion (5-7% more) of suspended students who had participated in restorative practices met expectations in Grade 9-12 credit accumulation than those who had not. In addition, over half (52%) had graduated with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma after four or five secondary school years, which is 2% higher than those who had not participated in restorative practices (50%).

Although the proportion of students who confirmed an Ontario university or college offer was the same (27%) for students who had participated in restorative practices and for those who had not, 2% more of the restorative-practice participants confirmed a university offer than the other group.

To support the Board's commitment for the success of all students, including those being suspended or expelled, it is recommended that the Board adopts the findings from this study so more effective intervention strategies, not just those limited to restorative practices, can be implemented to address student disciplinary matters. It is also recommended that more studies are needed in the future to fully understand the differentiated effects of restorative practices on suspended students based on their

cultural and ethno-racial background, school discipline history, and previous academic attainment and school engagement.

Background

A caring, safe, respectful, orderly, and purposeful learning environment in which everyone is engaged and demonstrates personal and social responsibility is essential to student learning. Persistent evidence has demonstrated that positive school climate is associated with enhanced academic motivation levels (Eccles et al., 1993), psychological well-being (Ruus et al., 2007; Virtanen et al., 2009), and school attendance (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1989). A sound school climate is also correlated with reductions in secondary school suspension rates (Lee et al., 2011), substance abuse, and mental health concerns (LaRusso et al., 2008; Ruus et al., 2007), as well as reduced acts of aggression, violence (Karcher, 2002; Gregory et al., 2010), and sexual harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009). Furthermore, a positive school climate has been found to mitigate the negative impact of socio-economic factors on academic trajectories (Astor, Benbenisty, & Estrada, 2009). For these reasons, Ontario's Education Act prohibits specific behaviours in every school in Ontario and, if no mitigating factors exist, requires mandatory suspensions or expulsions, in order to create and maintain a positive learning environment for all pupils.

As the largest school district in Canada and one of the most multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual school boards in the world, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) serves approximately 246,000 students in 583 regular day-schools and more than 140,000 life-long learners in its adult and continuing education programs in the 2017-18 school year. Over one quarter of the students were born outside of Canada in more than 175 countries, over half speak a language other than English, and about three quarters belong to a visible minority group. This diversity in the TDSB has been embraced as a strength, and it provides challenges as well as opportunities. The publicly funded school board values and is committed to the principles of equity to enable all students to reach their full potential in safe, nurturing, positive, and respectful learning environments that welcome differences and are free from discrimination.

Progressive discipline is the foundation of the discipline practices at the TDSB. Progressive discipline involves a whole-school approach that uses a continuum of prevention programs, interventions, supports, and consequences to address inappropriate student behaviours and to build upon strategies that promote and foster positive behaviours. Progressive discipline requires that mitigating and other factors be taken into account, and it relies on partnerships between schools, parents/guardians, and community agencies. Interventions that support a progressive discipline approach include but are not limited to: attendance, performance, or behaviour contracts, loss of privilege to participate in specified school activities, peer mediation, essay/poster campaign, counselling, community service, and restorative justice practices.

According to the *International Institute for Restorative Practices* website¹, restorative practices, which evolved from restorative justice, is a new field of study that has the potential to positively influence human behaviour and strengthen civil society around the world. It builds healthy communities, increases social capital, reduces the impact of crime, decreases antisocial behaviour, repairs harm, and restores relationships. The restorative practices framework in schools is meant as an integrated and proactive approach where a major goal is the effective reintegration of students when addressing situations where harm has been done. The framework has direct application to classroom teaching and learning, and creating and maintaining safe schools.

The TDSB has been gradually introducing restorative practices to its schools for more than twelve school years, as one of follow-up intervention strategies for suspended students, and also for teacher professional learning. However, there have been no large-scale studies on this particular topic in Ontario or even in Canada that investigate the impact of restorative practices on suspended students, or on school boards' caring and safe school programs. To fill the research gap, this study employs TDSB's student enrolment, discipline and achievement data from the past eleven school years, from 2006-07 to 2016-17, as well as student demographic data from the Board's unique 2006-07, 2011-12, and 2016-17 Student Censuses.

Literature Review

A positive learning and teaching climate is imperative for student achievement and well-being. Research has demonstrated a direct association between students' success and school climate [(Ontario's) Safe Schools Action Team, 2008]. Fostering and maintaining a positive school climate is no easy feat and requires a whole-school approach.

Schools are not immune to student misconduct. Many of these incidents stem from the student's attempt to fulfill a legitimate physical and/or psychosocial need or obtain an adult's attention (Haiman, 1998). For instance, they may be misbehaving in order to meet needs for attachment, attention, respect, control, or to be intellectually roused (Solter, 1998).

Inappropriate behaviour has primarily been addressed through punitive disciplinary approaches. In April 2000, the Ontario government introduced a zero tolerance policy for unacceptable school behaviour with the release of the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct "would make expulsions and suspensions mandatory for serious infractions like bringing weapons or illegal drugs to school, and sets out a zero tolerance policy for bad behaviour" (Ontario Ministry of Education, News Release, 2000).

However, exclusionary disciplinary practices (i.e., suspensions and expulsions) and a zero tolerance philosophy are seen to be detrimental and do not make schools safer. Such punitive measures weaken school relationships (Haft, 2000), hinder students' reintegration into school (Bazemore, 1999) and diminish school climate (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). In fact,

¹ <http://www.iirp.edu>

these devastating effects of epidemic proportions have contributed to what some call a school-to-prison pipeline in the United States.

In February 2008, Bill 212 was introduced to amend the Ontario Education Act with stipulations regarding behaviour, discipline, and safety. Namely, this Bill opened the door for a progressive discipline approach (i.e., prevention and early intervention) in the case of student misconduct, and the provision of programs and supports for the successful reintegration of suspended and expelled students.

Progressive discipline relies on a variety of disciplinary interventions, ranging in severity, so students can learn from their mistakes and improve their behaviour. The “framework of progressive discipline shifts the focus from one that is punitive to a focus that is supportive and corrective in nature” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 8). Strategies on the progressive discipline continuum include meetings with students and their parents/guardians, taking away privileges, peer mediation, and restorative practices, among others, with expulsion used as a last resort.

Interestingly, the impetus for shifting away from zero tolerance towards progressive discipline in education comes from evolvments in the Justice System. In April 2003, the Young Offender’s Act was replaced with the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) owing to an exhaustive review which found that Canada had record high rates of youth incarceration among westernized countries, youth are not effectively reintegrated following their sentence, and victims’ concerns are not adequately recognized (Department of Justice Canada, 2013). The YCJA addresses these challenges by “increasing the use of effective and timely non-court responses to less serious offences by youth, [...] requiring the young person to repair the harm done to the victim, [...] early intervention with young people, and provide the opportunity for the broader community to play an important role in developing community-based responses to youth crime” (Department of Justice Canada, 2013).

Restorative practices have their roots in the cultural traditions of Indigenous people around the world who seek to “live and learn in a good way with each other” (Durham District School Board Safe Schools, 2012) and “value interdependence, harmony and respect” (Lewington, 2016). Although this practice has been around for centuries, its modern-day application stems from restorative justice, or alternative sentencing, in the criminal justice system. Restorative justice has been defined by the Correctional Services of Canada as a “non-adversarial, non-retributive approach to justice that emphasizes healing in victims, meaningful accountability of those responsible for harm and the involvement of citizens in creating healthier, safer communities. Restorative justice works to repair the damage and promote healing and growth” (Pakan, 2007, p. 2). Wherein, traditional justice models transgressions have been met with punishment and retribution, restorative justice emphasizes repairing harm and restoring respect and relationships with victim(s) (Barton 2000; Marshall 1998).

Due to recent changes in provincial legislation, restorative practices have been taking a strong hold in schools across Ontario as zero tolerance acquiesced to progressive discipline regarding disciplinary and school climate matters. Restorative practices are described as “a whole-school ethos or culture comprising principles and practices to support peacemaking and solve conflict through healing damaged relationships and making amends where harm has been done while preserving the dignity of everyone

involved” (Meyer & Evans, 2012, p. 18). Restorative practices are also proactive in nature as they facilitate positive relationships and school climate. Several principles of restorative practice include:

- 1) *Interpersonal relationships*: healthy and inclusive interpersonal relationships in the school community (i.e., students, educators, parents/guardians, etc.);
- 2) *Personal dignity*: preserving the notion that every person belongs, is respected, cared for and has the right to equitable treatment;
- 3) *Mutual respect and understanding*: respectful dialogue about what happened and respect for each person’s experiences;
- 4) *Restorative conferencing*: pledge to conflict resolution and healing of interpersonal relationships; and
- 5) *Restitution*: accordance about efforts to repair the harm, defuse conflict and restore interpersonal relationships (Meyer & Evans, 2012).

Inherent to the definition of restorative practices is that there is no single standard of practice; each school has its own community, history, strengths, and areas of improvement which must be reflected in this people-focused approach. While different types of restorative practices are explored in the following section, common among all of them is the opportunity for the victim and the transgressor to discuss how they were affected, share their experiences honestly and safely, take responsibility (for the transgressor) and collaboratively determine restorative consequences to repair the harm (Drewery, 2004). Further, restorative practices entail the reintegration of the transgressor back into the school community.

Restorative practices exist on a continuum, ranging from informal to formal activities and involve affected stakeholders such as students, educators, families, and local communities (Restorative Practices Working Group, 2014; Wachtel, 2016):

- *Community conferencing* involves students and educators affected by the transgression to participate in the conflict resolution and conflict prevention process;
- *Community service* necessitates the transgressor to complete meaningful and relevant service to repair harm to the school community;
- *Peer juries* consist of trained student jurors to discuss with the transgressor the reason for the misconduct, who was affected, and restitution;
- *Circle process* is a common technique used pre-emptively to foster relationships and a sense of community and reactively to respond to misconduct. This restorative practice develops interpersonal and communication skills by inviting students and educators to take their turn speaking (i.e., about what happened, how they feel about it, how it has affected them, and possible reparation) and listening in a safe space;
- *Preventative and post-conflict resolution programs* provide students with opportunities to learn problem-solving (e.g., managing conflict, conflict resolution, etc.) and self-regulation skills;
- *Peer mediation* is a youth leadership model whereby trained students support their peers in effectively resolving conflict;

- *Affective statements and questions* are informal techniques to facilitate individuals' communication of their feelings (e.g., "I feel..." statements) and reflection on the impact of their behaviour (e.g., who was affected, how they were affected, etc.) on a regular basis; and
- *Social-emotional learning* allows students to learn skills which enhance their awareness and management of emotions, develop empathy and self-regulation, and build positive relationships.

Overall, restorative practices embody a mindset that, when permeated into the fabric of the school community, they can be employed to develop and maintain a safe and caring school climate. While long-time advocates of restorative practices describe their transformational impact on schools, there is modest rigorously collected evidence.

According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), restorative practices "reduce crime, violence and bullying, improve human behaviour, strengthen civil society, provide effective leadership, restore relationships and repair harm" (Wachtel, 2016, IIRP website). Additional research from the IIRP found fewer disciplinary referrals, decreased rates of suspensions and expulsions, decreased instructional time lost due to behaviour management, increased educator morale and retention, enhanced academic outcomes and decreases in disproportional rates of disciplinary referrals of minority students (Porter, 2007). This progressive disciplinary measure has also been associated with improvements in attendance, academic achievement and graduation rates, and reduced number of classroom disruptions (McMorris et al., 2013).

One of the most comprehensive evaluations of school-based restorative practices was conducted in the United Kingdom. This study employed surveys and interviews with 5,000 students, 1,150 staff members, and 600 community members (Bitel, 2005). Schools which exercised restorative practices witnessed reductions in bullying, improved student behaviour, and enhanced disciplinary mindset of educators (i.e., not resorting to suspensions). Nearly all students who engaged in restorative processes were satisfied and deemed it to be fair and just.

A study of 18 pilot schools in Scotland produced similar successes to those demonstrated in England. McCluckley and colleagues surveyed, facilitated interviews and focus groups, and observed stakeholders following two years of employing restorative practices (2008). This research indicated that students felt more positive about their school experience, attendance and staff morale improved, and playground incidents, disciplinary referrals, and rates of expulsions decreased.

In Nova Scotia, Canada, a shift to restorative practices in education has been associated with a "more positive and collegial environment among staff, resulting in fewer staff absentee days, a higher level of student involvement in school life, and dramatic reductions in discipline referrals" (Shafer & Mirsky, 2011, p. 1).

Even closer to home, Nanavati and colleagues (n.d.) monitored restorative practices that were implemented at a secondary school and its feeder (middle) school in Peel District School Board. These practices included class meetings, peer mediation, bullying prevention, conferences as well as various

forms of restorative support, such as anger management, mentoring, youth substance and character education programs. Over the course of four years, they found that suspension rates declined from 569 in 2003-04 to 82 in 2006-07 at the secondary school level and from 200 in 2002-03 to 30 in 2006-07 at the middle school level.

More recently, in July 2015 the Lakehead District School Board investigated the implementation of restorative practices at three schools. While this evaluation revealed positive findings, such as decreased number of suspensions and enhanced student attitudes towards learning, it also concluded that the benefits of restorative practices can be maximized when they are implemented school-wide (Lewington, 2016).

Although a growing body of research has established that restorative practices, while not a novel approach to the prevention and management of harmful actions, can effectively foster positive relationships and school climate, the impact of restorative practices as an intervention for students facing exclusionary discipline (i.e., suspension and expulsion) at the Toronto District School Board is currently unknown. To fill this gap and to provide the Board with concrete evidence on the short- and long-term impact of restorative practices on suspended/expelled students, this study first provides an overview of the TDSB's Caring and Safe Schools data in the past eleven school years, then examines the demographic background of those students being suspended or expelled in these school years, and finally tracks and analyzes their academic progress, school engagement, graduation outcomes, and post-secondary destinations following their participation in restorative practices.

An Overview of the TDSB's Caring and Safe Schools Data

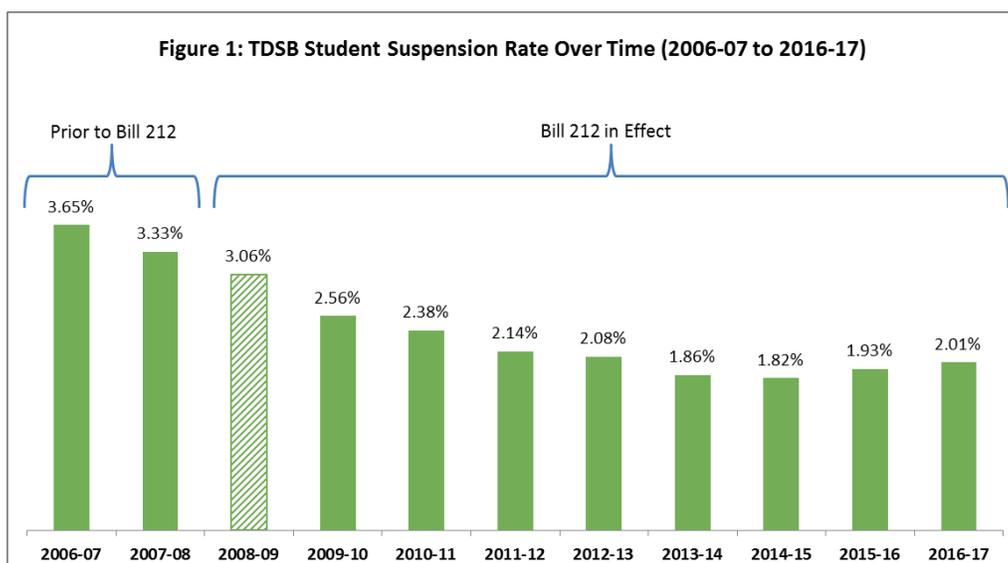
On February 1, 2008, Bill 212: The Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety) came into effect. As such, the "safe schools" provisions of the Education Act were amended from a zero tolerance policy for unacceptable school behaviours to a progressive discipline approach. Thus, caring and safe schools data (i.e., suspensions and expulsions) prior to the 2008-09 school year are not comparable to the data from school years after the legislation of Bill 212. In addition, 2008-09 was the first full school year with Bill 212 being in effect when school boards across the province were trying to understand and implement this new approach for school discipline matters. For these reasons, data from this year were also excluded from any trend analysis.

Table 1 shows the total number of suspensions, number of students suspended and the total number of expulsions over the period of eleven school years, from 2006-07 to 2016-17.

Table 1: Suspensions and Expulsions in TDSB Schools, 2006-07 to 2016-17

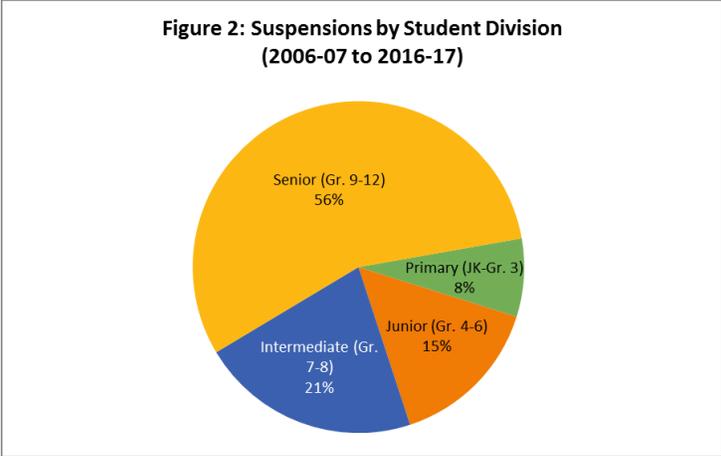
School Year		Enrolment (October 31st)	# of Suspensions	# of Students Suspended	Suspension Rate	# of Expulsions
Prior to Bill 212	2006-07	272,035	14,756	9,923	3.65%	258
	2007-08	267,097	13,010	8,890	3.33%	202
Bill 212 in Effect	2008-09	261,168	11,572	7,979	3.06%	68
	2009-10	259,962	9,635	6,655	2.56%	59
	2010-11	259,317	9,028	6,184	2.38%	35
	2011-12	258,598	8,120	5,534	2.14%	43
	2012-13	256,255	7,796	5,321	2.08%	52
	2013-14	252,899	6,894	4,697	1.86%	63
	2014-15	248,912	6,774	4,524	1.82%	70
	2015-16	244,789	6,971	4,725	1.93%	79
	2016-17	245,559	7,306	4,927	2.01%	64

Figure 1 shows the suspension rates (defined as the number of students being suspended throughout the school year divided by the student enrolment as of October 31st) for these school years.

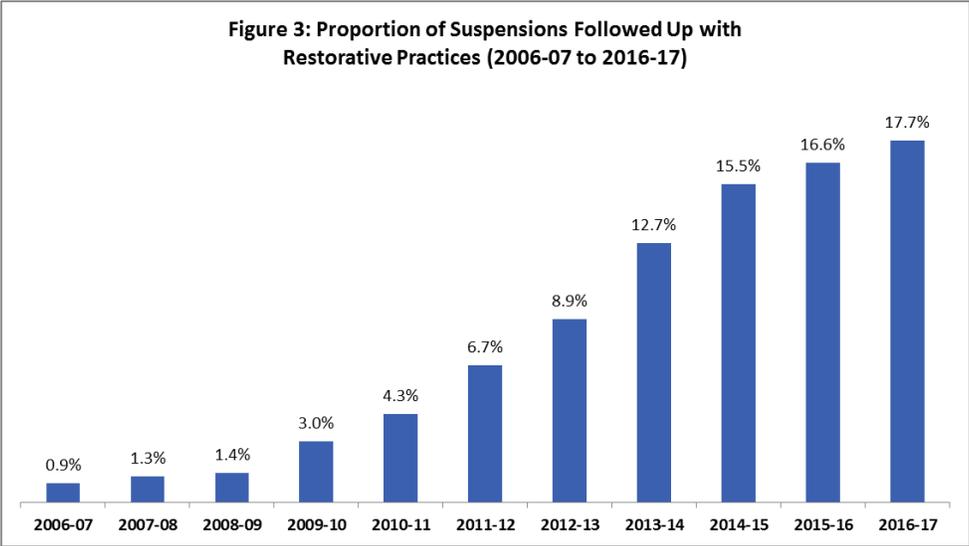


As shown in Table 1, the number of expulsions was quite small in comparison with the number of suspensions. Since expelled students must be suspended first pending the outcomes of the investigation and the subsequent expulsion hearing, in the following analyses, expulsions were included as part of the suspensions.

Over three quarters (78%) of suspensions during this eleven-year period were issued to male students. More than half (56%) were issued to secondary school (Grade 9-12) students (see Figure 2).



While the number of suspensions generally declined over time, the proportion of suspensions whereby restorative practices were implemented as the intervention method(s) increased steadily in this eleven-year period, from less than 1% in the 2006-07 school year to 18% in the 2016-17 school year (see Figure 3).

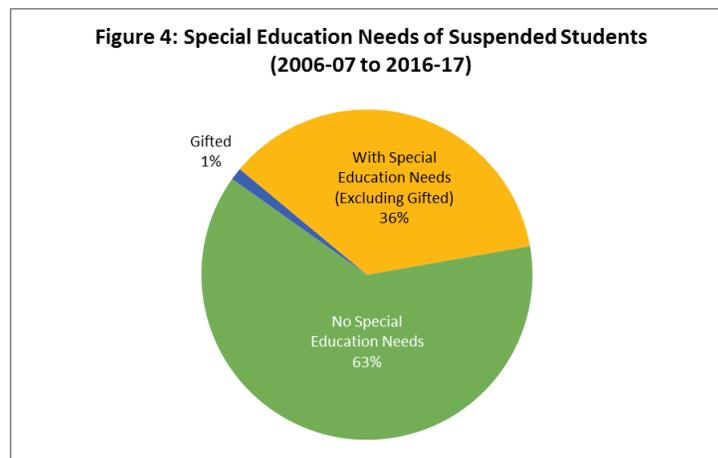


A detailed examination of the suspension records from these eleven school years revealed that the following types of suspensions were more likely to be associated with the adoption of restorative practices as intervention method(s): hate or bias-motivated occurrence, physical assault, inappropriate use of electronic communication/media, bullying, uttering a threat, vandalism, fighting, and aiding/inciting harmful behavior.

Demographics of Suspended Students

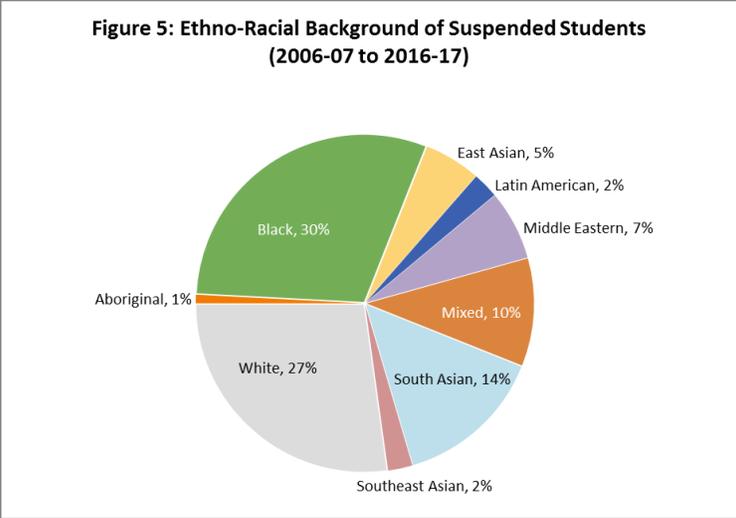
Over the period of eleven school years, from 2006-07 to 2016-17, in total, there were 44,316 students being suspended in TDSB schools², representing 7% of the entire student population during the same period. Among these suspended students, 74% were males, and 26% were females. According to the student registration data, 75% of them were born in Canada, 61% spoke English as the primary language at home, and 51% were from a single-parent family.

As show in Figure 4, more than one third (36%) of the suspended students had special education needs (excluding the 1% Gifted students), with Learning Disability, Mild Intellectual Disability, and Behaviour being the top three exceptionalities for students who had an identified exceptionality through the formal IPRC (Identification, Placement, and Review Committee) process.



² Students were counted only once if they were suspended multiple times during the eleven-year period.

Linking the Board’s Caring and Safe Schools data to its unique Parent and Student Censuses conducted in the 2006-08³, 2011-12, and 2016-17 school years revealed that more than two-thirds (68%) of suspended students had a self-identified ethno-racial background. Among them, 30% were Black students, followed by White (27%), South Asian (14%), Mixed (10%), and Middle Eastern (7%) students (see Figure 5).



Among all the 44,316 students who were suspended in the eleven school years, 3,330 of them, or 7.5%, participated in restorative practices during the school year in which they were suspended. An analysis of their demographic background reveals that they had a very similar background as the entire group: 74% were males, 76% were born in Canada, 58% spoke English as the primary language at home, 51% were from a single-parent family, and 44% had special education needs (excluding Gifted). For those with a self-identified ethno-racial background, they consisted of the following ethno-racial groups: Black (29%), White (23%), South Asian (15%), Mixed (13%), and Middle Eastern (7%).

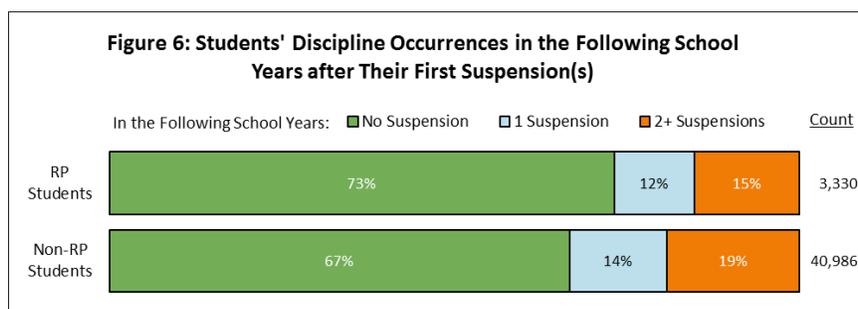
³ The first Student Census was conducted in the 2006-07 school year for students in Grades 7-12, and the first Parent Census was conducted in the 2007-08 school year for students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6.

Effects of Restorative Practices on Suspended Students

In the following sections, suspended students from the eleven-year period were divided into two groups: students who participated in restorative practices (RP) during the school year when they were suspended (the RP students) and students who did not participate in restorative practices (the non-RP students). Their school discipline history, attendance records, achievement results on provincial standardized assessments and report cards, and graduation outcomes of those who were eligible to graduate after five-year secondary schooling, were analyzed and then compared in order to evaluate the short- and long-term impact of restorative practices on suspended students' school engagement and academic achievement.

Discipline Occurrences after the First Suspension

Students' school discipline incidents in the school years after their first suspension(s)⁴ were tracked for both groups of suspended students to investigate whether restorative practices had successfully reduced the possibility of being re-suspended after this intervention method. As demonstrated in Figure 6, almost three quarters (73%) of students who had participated restorative practices after their first suspension(s), (i.e., the RP students), did not have any further suspensions in the following school years, while two-third (67%) of students who had not participated in restorative practices (i.e., the non-RP students) did not have any suspension in the following school years.



It should also be noted that 27% of students who had participated in restorative practices, were suspended again in the subsequent school years (12% once and 15% twice or more times). In contrast, the proportion being suspended again in the following school years was 33% (6% more) for the other group.

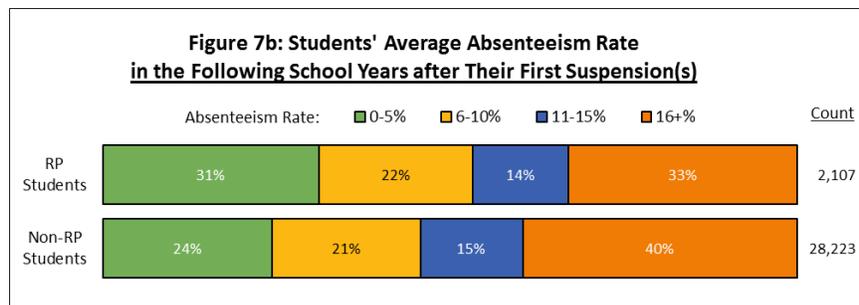
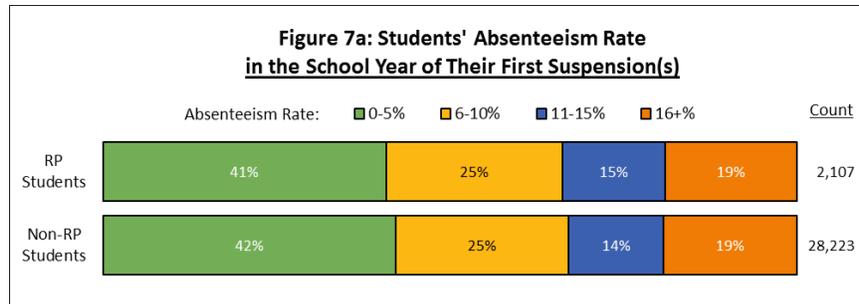
School Absenteeism Rates

Suspended students' school attendance records in the school year when they were first suspended and in the following school years were used to compute their school absenteeism rates across these school years for both groups of students. A student's absenteeism rate in a school year was calculated as the number of school days being absent divided by the total number of school days the student was

⁴ Although the majority of students had one suspension during a school year, some students could have two or more suspensions during the same school year.

supposed to attend. For example, there were 187 school days in the 2016-17 school year, therefore a 10% absenteeism rate means a student missed 19 school days.

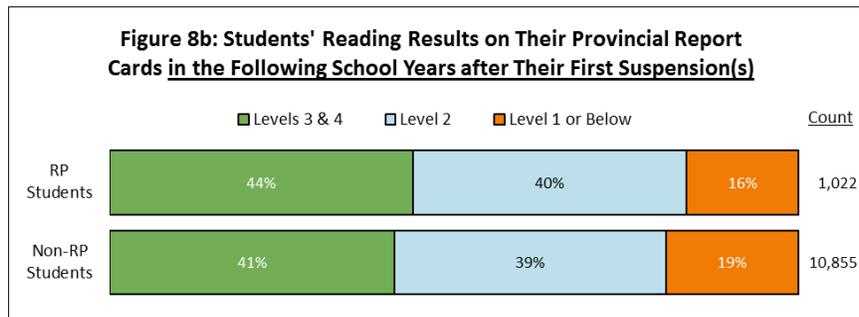
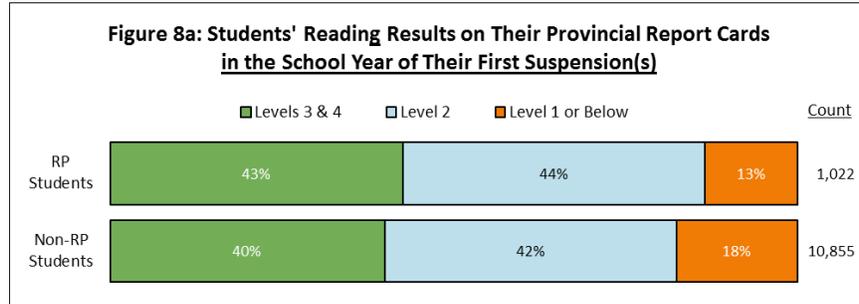
Figures 7a and 7b show suspended students' absenteeism rates in the school year when they were first suspended and their average absenteeism rate in the following school years, for those who had attendance records in at least one following school year after their first suspension(s). Hence, the student counts in these two figures are identical for each student group as they were for the same students.



As shown in Figure 7a, there was very little difference in absenteeism rates between the two student groups in the school year when they were first suspended. However, significant differences were observed in the following school years (Figure 7b). Although both groups had higher absenteeism rates in the school years following their first suspension(s), (i.e., having fewer students in the low-absenteeism rate category and more in the higher absenteeism categories), the RP students had much lower absenteeism rate (i.e., better school attendance) in the following school years than the non-RP students. For example, 31% of RP students had a very low absenteeism rate, 7% more than the non-RP students (24%) (see Figure 7b).

Achievement Results on Elementary School Report Cards

For elementary school students who were suspended at or before Grade 7, their achievement results on their provincial report cards in the school year when they were first suspended, and in the school years following their first suspension(s) were compared for both student groups.⁵ Figures 8a and 8b show the reading results. Again, the student counts in the two figures for the respective student group are identical as they were for the same students.



Students who had participated in restorative practices (the RP students) and students who had not participated (the non-RP students) had similar reading results in the school year when they were first suspended and in the following school years, suggesting restorative practices had very little or no direct impact on suspended elementary school students' academic achievement.

Similar patterns were observed on the subjects of writing and mathematics, as well as on suspended elementary school students' learning skills.

Credit Accumulation in Secondary Schools

Suspended students' credit accumulation by the end of Grades 9 to 12 had been tracked and analyzed for the two student groups (the RP and non-RP students). As these students were suspended from different school years at different grades, their credit accumulation by the end of Grades 9 to 12 were identified through a cohort tracking process (see Table 2).

⁵ If students had report card results from more than one school year following the school year when they were first suspended, the report card results from the latest school year were used in this comparison.

For example, for students in Grade 8 who were suspended in the 2011-12 school year (Cohort 11 in Table 2), their credit accumulation came from the 2012-13 school year for Grade 9 credits, 2013-14 for Grade 10 credits, 2014-15 for Grade 11 credits, 2015-16 for Grade 12 (Year 4) credits⁶, and 2016-17 for Grade 12 (Year 5) credits.

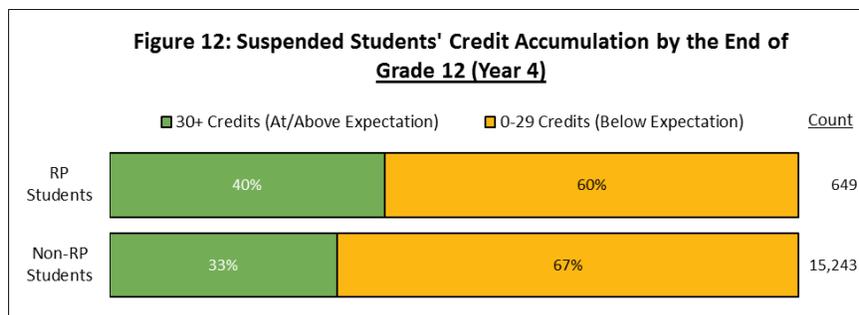
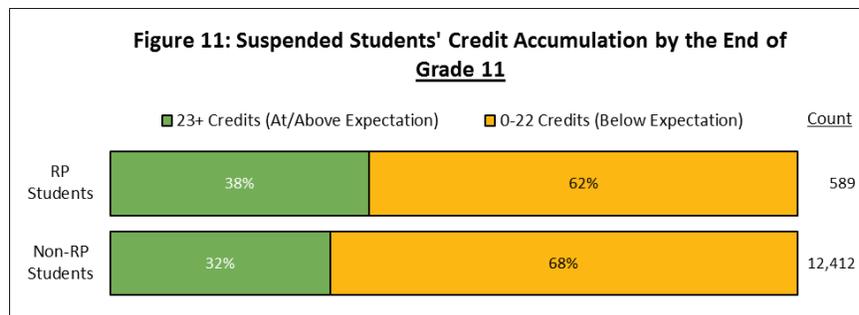
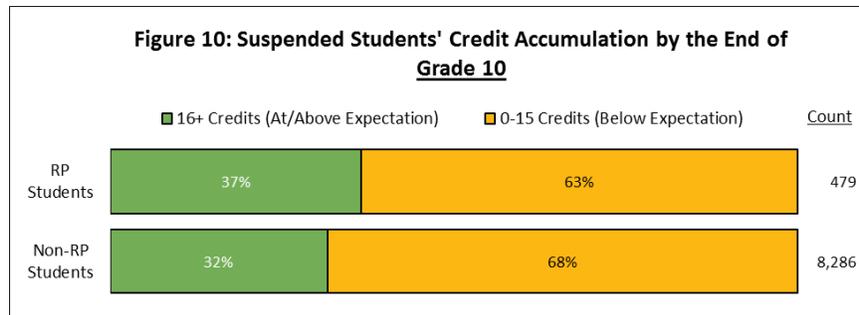
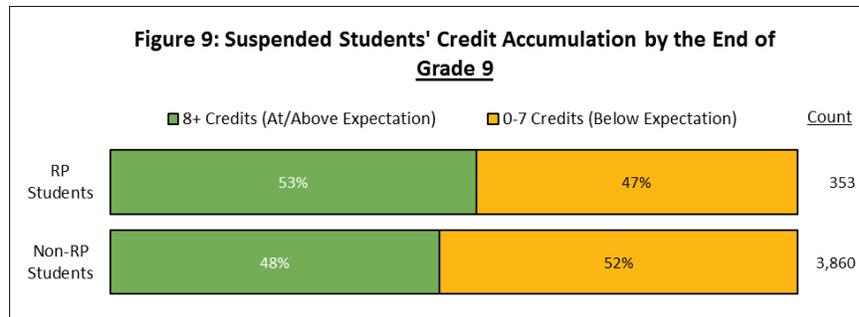
Table 2: Cohort Tracking Process of Suspended Students

Cohort	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
25											JK
24										JK	SK
23									JK	SK	Gr. 1
22								JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2
21							JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3
20						JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4
19					JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5
18				JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
17			JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7
16		JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8
15	JK	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9
14	SK	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10
13	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11
12	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12
11	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5
10	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5	
9	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5		
8	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5			
7	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5				
6	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5					
5	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5						
4	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5							
3	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Year 5								
2	Gr. 12	Year 5									
1	Year 5										

In order to examine the effects of restorative practices, only students' credit information after their first suspension(s) was tracked. For instance, if a student was first suspended in Grade 10, only his/her credits in Grades 10 to 12 were used in the following analyses. As students in Ontario need at least 30 credits to earn an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), the expected number of credits used in this study is eight by the end of Grade 9, sixteen by Grade 10, twenty-three by Grade 11, and thirty by Grade 12.

As shown in Figures 9 to 12, a greater proportion (between 5-7%) of suspended students who had participated in the restorative practices (the RP students) were meeting credit expectations by the end of Grades 9 to 11 and Grade 12 (Year 4) than students who did not participate (the non-RP students).

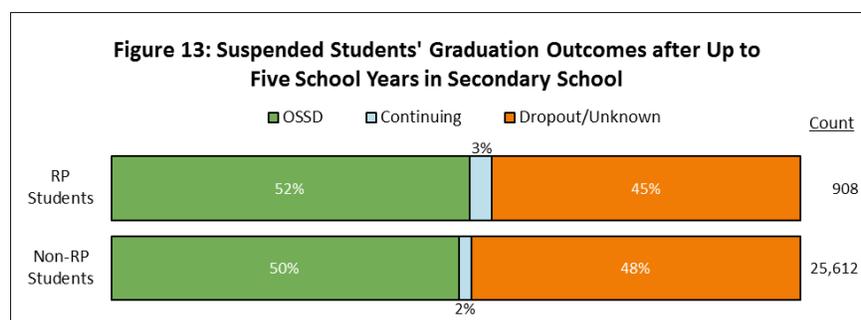
⁶ Although the majority of secondary school students would graduate in four school years, some students chose to return to Grade 12 for an additional year(s) due to various reasons such as not having enough credits or trying to have better marks.



Since the number of RP students who took an additional school year in Grade 12 (i.e., the Year 5 students) was small (N=43) when compared with the number of non-RP students (N=1,104), their credit accumulation by the end of Year 5 was not provided in this report.

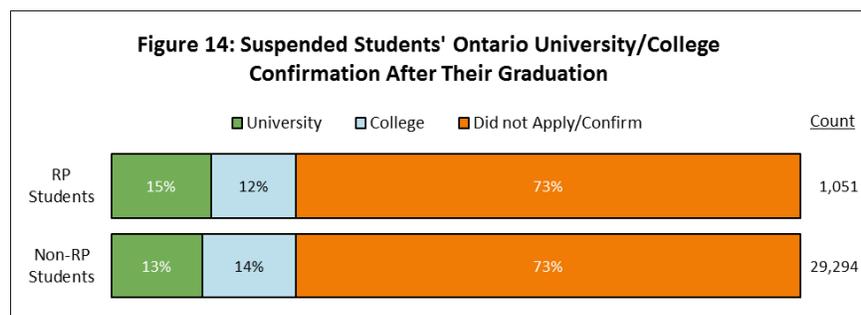
Graduation Rates and Post-Secondary Destinations

For those suspended students who were eligible to graduate in five school years (Student Cohorts 1 to 11 in Table 2), their graduation outcomes after five secondary school years were classified into one of the following three categories after excluding those who transferred out of the TDSB school system: graduated with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), continued their study in the TDSB, or dropped out or had unknown destinations. See Figure 13 for the graduation outcomes of the two student groups (the RP and non-RP students).



Over half (52%) of students who had participated in restorative practices graduated after four or five school years in secondary school, which is 2% higher than those students who had not participated (50%). This also means a very significant proportion of suspended students did not graduate: 45% for RP students and 48% for non-RP students.

Figure 14 shows their post-secondary destinations in Ontario universities or colleges after linking their graduation outcomes to the Ontario university or college application data.



Only 27% of RP students confirmed an offer from an Ontario university or college, which is the same for non-RP students. Although, 2% more RP students confirmed an Ontario university offer than non-RP students, 73% of suspended students, regardless of whether they had participated in restorative practices or not, did not attend a post-secondary institution in Ontario.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

A caring, safe, respectful, orderly, and purposeful learning environment in which everyone is engaged and demonstrates personal and social responsibility is essential to student learning. Progressive discipline is the foundation of the caring and safe schools practices at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), which involves a whole-school approach that uses a continuum of prevention programs, interventions, supports, and consequences to address inappropriate student behaviours and to build upon strategies that promote and foster positive behaviours.

Restorative practices, which evolved from restorative justice, have been taking a strong hold in schools across Ontario as zero tolerance acquiesced to progressive discipline regarding disciplinary and school climate matters. The restorative practices framework in schools is meant as an integrated and proactive approach where a major goal is the effective reintegration of students when addressing situations where harm has been done. The framework has direct application to classroom teaching and learning, and creating and maintaining safe schools.

The TDSB has been gradually introducing restorative practices to its schools for more than twelve school years, as one of the follow-up intervention strategies for suspended students and for teacher professional learning. To fully understand the short- and long-term impacts of restorative practices on the Board's caring and safe school programs, and on suspended/expelled students, this study employed student registration, discipline, and achievement data from the past eleven school years as well as student demographic data from the Board's unique Student and Parent Censuses.

Summary of Findings

Over the period of eleven school years, from 2006-07 to 2016-17, a total of 44,316 students were suspended at least once, representing 7% of the entire student population during the same period. Among them, 74% were males, 75% were born in Canada, 61% spoke English as the primary language at home, and 51% were from a single-parent family. More than one third (36%) had special education needs (excluding Gifted), with Learning Disability, Mild Intellectual Disability, and Behaviour being the top three identified exceptionalities. Among the two-thirds of students who had a self-identified ethno-racial background, 30% were Black students, followed by White (27%), South Asian (14%), Mixed (10%), and Middle Eastern (7%) students.

While the number of suspensions at TDSB schools generally declined over time, the proportion of suspensions whereby restorative practices were implemented as one of the intervention strategies increased steadily over time, from less than 1% in the 2006-07 school year to 18% in the 2016-17 school year.

It has been observed that restorative practices had a positive impact on reducing the possibility of students being re-suspended: Almost three quarters (73%) of students who had participated in restorative practices after their first suspension(s) did not have any suspensions in the following school years, which is 6% more than students who had not participated in restorative practices (67%).

While there was almost no difference in absenteeism rates in the school year when students were first suspended, in the subsequent school years, a greater proportion (7% more) of students who had participated in restorative practices had a very low absenteeism rate (i.e., better school attendance) than students who had not participated.

Elementary school students who had participated in the restorative practices and students who had not participated had similar achievement results in reading, writing, and mathematics in the school year when they were first suspended, and in the following school years, suggesting restorative practices had a very minor or no direct impact on suspended elementary school students' academic achievement.

Tracking students by cohorts in secondary schools revealed that a greater proportion (5-7% more) of suspended students who had participated in restorative practices were meeting expectations in Grades 9 to 12 credit accumulation than those who had not participated. In addition, over half (52%) of them graduated in four or five school years in secondary school, which is 2% higher than those students who had not participated in restorative practices (50%).

Although the proportion of students who were eligible to graduate after four or five school years in secondary school, and who confirmed an Ontario university or college offer, was the same (27%) for students who had participated in restorative practices and for those who had not participated, 2% more restorative-practice participants confirmed a university offer than the other group. However, this also means that 73% of suspended students, regardless whether they had participated in restorative practices or not, did not attend a post-secondary institution in Ontario.

Recommendations

Our mission is to enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society. To support the Board's commitment to the success of all students, including those being suspended or expelled, it is recommended that the Board adopts the findings from this report so more effective intervention strategies, not just those limited to restorative practices, can be implemented in our caring and safe schools programs to address student disciplinary matters.

It is also recommended that more studies are needed in the future to fully understand the differentiated effects of restorative practices on suspended students based on their cultural and ethno-racial background, school discipline history, and previous academic attainment and school engagement.

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