

# Resources on Positive School Discipline

*From the AFT and Our Partners*

The AFT has developed a number of resources to help educators implement positive discipline strategies (see the collection housed at [www.aft.org/discipline](http://www.aft.org/discipline)), including:

- “Support Restorative Justice Programs in Schools That Receive Public Funds” is a resolution adopted at the 2014 AFT convention in support of personnel, training, and resources for implementing restorative justice programs.
- “Creating a Positive School Climate,” “Books, Not Bars,” and “Reclaiming the Promise of Racial Equity” are among the pamphlets and brochures that advocate union-driven solutions for positive student behavior and investments in schooling over juvenile detention centers.
- “Thrive: Student Health Matters” and “Helping Children Thrive” are among the booklets promoting strategies that support children’s physical, mental, and social well-being.

Another powerful resource, “**Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools,**” was developed collaboratively by the AFT, the National Education Association, the Advancement Project, and the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign, with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies. This guide for educators explains what restorative practices are and how they can be integrated into the classroom, curriculum, and school culture to help build safe learning environments.

As shown in Figure 1, restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing. These practices focus on repairing harm, addressing community needs, and building and sustaining healthy relationships. Types of restorative practices addressed in this guide include restorative justice, community conferencing, community service, peer juries, circle processes, preventative and postconflict resolutions, peer mediations, and social-emotional learning. These practices are intended to comple-

**Figure 1. What Are Restorative Practices?**

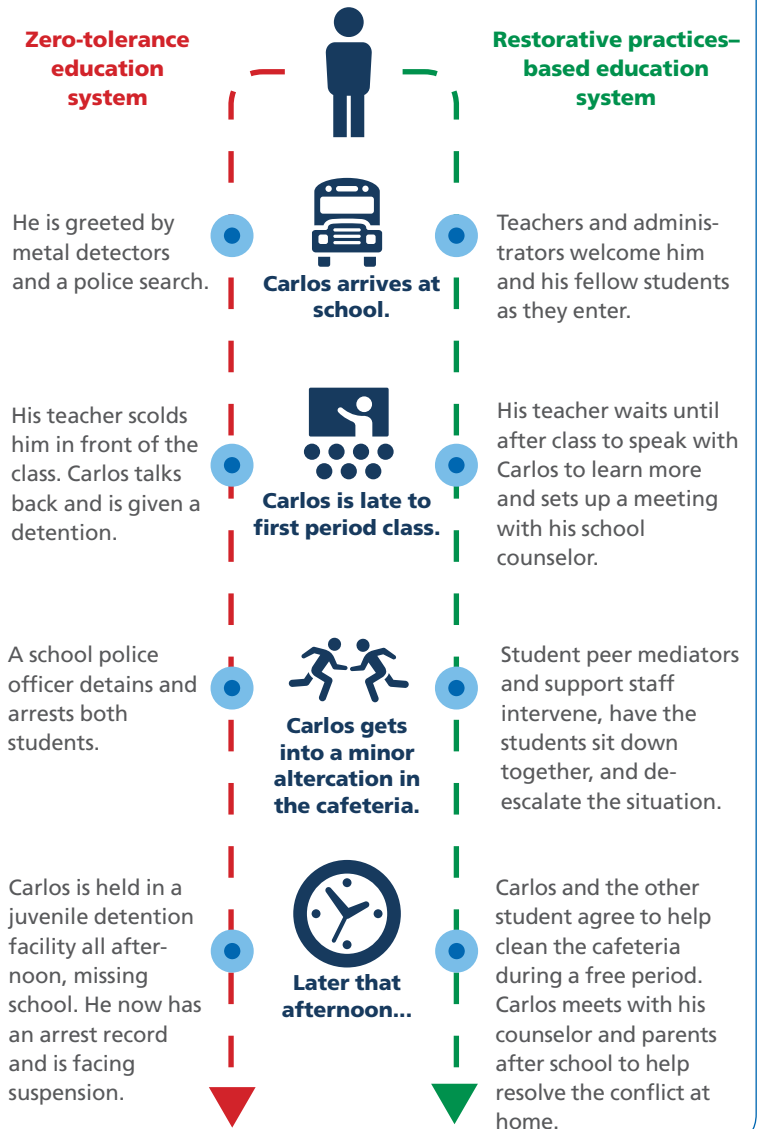


ment a school’s ongoing initiatives (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, social and emotional learning programs) by offering alternatives to suspensions and expulsions and building a foundation for addressing issues quickly and thoughtfully.

This guide highlights some key cultural differences between schools that embrace restorative practices and those that employ zero-tolerance systems. Figure 2 illustrates how the two frameworks differ and the impact each has on staff and student interactions, facility design, and general responses to code of conduct infractions. The guide also discusses “spheres of influence” and provides a framework for activating these spheres around restorative practices in the classroom, school campus, and community. The guide can be downloaded for free at [www.bit.ly/1fKne1A](http://www.bit.ly/1fKne1A).

**Figure 2. A Tale of Two Schools**

Carlos had a heated argument with his parents before leaving for school, so he’s running late. Let’s see the difference that restorative policies and practices can make.

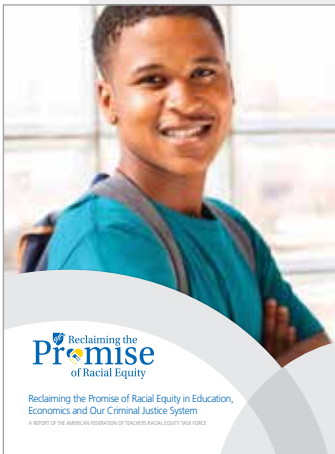


# Report on Racial Equity

In the fall of 2015, the AFT’s Racial Equity Task Force published “**Reclaiming the Promise of Racial Equity in Education, Economics and Our Criminal Justice System**,” a groundbreaking report that includes a discussion of overly punitive school discipline (see <http://go.aft.org/RETf>). Resulting from blunt, uncomfortable, and courageous conversations about how to address the effects of racism and inequity in our nation—especially related to black males—the AFT became the first public sector union in modern history to issue a substantive, action-oriented report on achieving racial equity in America. It provides a framework for the development of policy in national and state legislation, at the school board level, and inside the AFT itself.

The report highlights a number of recommendations that the AFT hopes to implement in partnership with its state and local affiliates, including the need to:

- Fund programs that provide alternatives to out-of-school suspensions that offer meaningful educational opportunities for black male students.
- Ensure that all schools are safe and welcoming spaces for students and educators, which means replacing zero-tolerance policies with restorative justice practices and fairer enforcement.
- Develop and implement programs to intentionally help identify, recruit, support, and retain black male educators and staff.
- Provide professional development and cultural competency training that help teachers and other school staff understand their own personal biases.
- Create review processes in schools to ensure that black male students are treated fairly.
- Develop funding strategies, mentoring, and counseling to create greater opportunity for black males to attend college.
- Establish partnerships with trade unions to develop apprenticeship programs that provide job training and placement in trade careers that can open the door to economic opportunity and independence for black men.
- Continue and expand the AFT’s work with the Conferences of Chief Justices to help establish engagement strategies to bridge the gap between minority and low-income communities and court leadership through collaborative efforts that will increase public trust and confidence in the states’ courts.



## Resources for Understanding the Problem

In addition to resources from the AFT, our partners offer educators a number of excellent resources for engaging in this work:

**Discipline Disparities: A Research-to-Practice Collaborative**  
The Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative is a culmination of research on zero-tolerance policies and more effective approaches to school discipline. ([www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/briefing-papers](http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/briefing-papers))

**Teaching Tolerance**  
A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance offers professional development to help teachers ensure that schools are diverse, welcoming

communities. ([www.tolerance.org/professional-development](http://www.tolerance.org/professional-development))

**“Advancing School Discipline Reform” (National Association of State Boards of Education report)**  
American Institutes for Research analysts Greta Colombi and David Osher report the latest findings on punitive school discipline policies, the effect they have on students, and alternative methods of discipline. ([www.bit.ly/1P8Cnxs](http://www.bit.ly/1P8Cnxs))

**“The Hidden Cost of Suspension: How Can Kids Learn If They’re Not in School?” (National Center for Education Statistics data maps)**  
These interactive data maps show the

percentage of students who have received one or more out-of-school suspensions by district, disability status, race, and gender, using data from the federal Office for Civil Rights. (<http://1.usa.gov/115aST3>)

**National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments**  
The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Healthy Students, provides training and support to state administrators, school district administrators, institutions of higher education, teachers, school support staff, communities, families, and students to improve learning environments. (<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>)

## Partners and Allies

Though far from an exhaustive list, the following organizations include some of the AFT's key allies in school discipline reform. For more than a decade, these groups have worked to highlight discipline disparities, and there have been positive changes in school discipline as a result of collaboration with them. In addition, The Atlantic Philanthropies, whose work in this area ends in 2016, has been instrumental in seeding change (see page 34 for more on that effort).

The **Advancement Project** ([www.advancementproject.org](http://www.advancementproject.org)) is a multiracial civil rights organization. Its "Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track" program has played a pivotal role in changing policies and practices across legal and education communities.

The **Alliance for Educational Justice** ([www.alliance4edjustice.org/about](http://www.alliance4edjustice.org/about)) is a national collective of approximately 30 intergenerational and youth organizing groups that work with policymakers to prepare all students for college, meaningful employment, and full participation in democracy. The alliance organizes for public schools where all young people are treated with dignity and respect, and are free from harmful student discipline policies that fuel the criminalization and incarceration of youth of color.

The **Dignity in Schools Campaign** ([www.dignityinschools.org](http://www.dignityinschools.org)) challenges the systemic problem of "push-outs" in our nation's schools and advocates for the human right of every child to a high-quality education. It unites parents, youth, educators, and advocates in a campaign to promote local and national alternatives to zero-tolerance policies, punitive punishments, and removal from school.

The **NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund** ([www.naacpldf.org](http://www.naacpldf.org)) fights racial discrimination in public education, eliminates barriers to full political participation by all Americans in our nation's democratic processes, champions economic equality, and confronts persistent racial inequalities in the criminal justice system.

The **National Alliance of Black School Educators** ([www.nabse.org](http://www.nabse.org)), a nonprofit organization comprised of more than 10,000 educators, administrators, and superintendents, is dedicated to improving the educational experiences and accomplishments of African American youth.

The **National Opportunity to Learn Campaign** ([www.otlcampaign.org](http://www.otlcampaign.org)) unites a growing coalition of advocates and organizers from across the country working to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality public education.

In Baltimore, the **Open Society Institute** ([www.osf.to/1QBcjLL](http://www.osf.to/1QBcjLL)) finds ways to keep children engaged and connected to school by supporting citywide reforms to lower suspension rates, increase attendance, and explore new programs for Baltimore's high schools. The institute also focuses on ensuring that treatment for drug addiction is accessible, and it works to reduce the number of youth involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

The **Schott Foundation** ([www.schottfoundation.org](http://www.schottfoundation.org)) advocates for fully resourced, high-quality public education for all children. It collaborates with grass-roots organizations and philanthropic partners committed to equity and justice for all children in the United States.

## Resources for Moving Forward

Many terrific programs can be used to maintain order in the classroom while helping educators focus less on punishment and more on teaching students how to handle situations differently. In addition to the guide on restorative practices (see page 39), the following can help:

### Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

To learn more about PBIS and training opportunities, the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)) and the Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports initiative ([www.crbis.org](http://www.crbis.org)) are two good places to start.

### Social and Emotional Learning

For more about social and emotional learning and how it relates to school discipline, the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children ([www.bit.ly/1PDQMon](http://www.bit.ly/1PDQMon)) features resources for educators and caregivers about enhancing social skills for young

children with challenging behavior. Also, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([www.bit.ly/1n01Jcn](http://www.bit.ly/1n01Jcn)), which operates in eight urban districts, including Chicago and Cleveland, offers resources about social and emotional learning, bullying prevention, and educator training. For early childhood educators, the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>) is another valuable resource.

### Positive School Climates

The National School Climate Center ([www.schoolclimate.org](http://www.schoolclimate.org)) offers a number of resources, including a list of specific dimensions that characterize a healthy school climate. ([www.bit.ly/1RqZ5S6](http://www.bit.ly/1RqZ5S6))

### School Safety

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence provides assistance to groups committed to understanding and preventing violence; its Safe Communities Safe Schools Initiative ([www.bit.ly/1MGXmEF](http://www.bit.ly/1MGXmEF))

Seeking additional information or answers to questions about positive discipline strategies? Visit [www.aft.org/discipline](http://www.aft.org/discipline) or email Lisa Thomas in the AFT educational issues department at [schooldiscipline@aft.org](mailto:schooldiscipline@aft.org).

offers research on school safety and prevention through publications, trainings, and technical assistance.

### Mental Health

For supports to improve the lives of children and young adults with mental health challenges, the National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health (<http://gucchdtacenter.georgetown.edu>) provides trainings, webinars, and other resources.

### Educational Equity

The Region IX Equity Assistance Center at WestEd ([www.bit.ly/1LDePRf](http://www.bit.ly/1LDePRf)) provides professional development and technical assistance on civil rights and educational equity to schools and education agencies in Arizona, California, and Nevada.