

## University of Chicago Education Lab Study Finds Restorative Practices Decrease Student Arrests In and Outside School

*Chicago Public Schools saw a 35 percent reduction in arrests in school and a 15 percent reduction in out-of-school arrests for students at schools that implemented Restorative Practices.*

CHICAGO—New research from the University of Chicago Education Lab — just chronicled in the [Washington Post](#) — finds that restorative practices in schools can significantly reduce student arrests, increase student perceptions of belonging and school safety, and decrease arrests for violent offenses. [The study](#), which evaluated the effect of restorative practices (RP) implemented across Chicago Public Schools’ (CPS) high schools beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year, suggests RP is generating genuine, positive changes in underlying student behavior. Schools that implemented RP policies saw a staggering 35 percent reduction in student arrests in school and a 15 percent reduction in out-of-school student arrests. The study saw declines in arrests for both violent and non-violent offenses.

“For the last decade, CPS has been working tirelessly to reduce the reliance on punitive measures as a response to student behavior,” said **CPS Chief Safety and Security Officer Jadine Chou**. “As more evidence becomes available regarding the benefits of restorative practices, I hope school districts follow our lead and implement similar programs with equally successful outcomes.”

Instead of using punitive measures, RP promotes the development of socio-emotional learning by encouraging self-reflection, empathetic listening, and the creation of non-judgmental spaces for conflict resolution. The study measured the impact of RP on student behavior and educational outcomes in Chicago, the nation’s fourth-largest school district. In addition to significant decreases in student arrests, RP decreased out-of-school suspensions by 18 percent and improved students’ perceptions of school climate. This improvement in perception is driven by large increases in students’ perceptions that their peers’ classroom behavior improved, their increased feeling that they belong at school, and that school is a safe place to be.

Programmatic benefits were particularly large for Black students, although the authors also found evidence that Latino male students’ test scores may have declined in response to RP adoption. Future research is needed to understand why students might have been affected in different ways.

“The implementation of restorative practices in schools has been critical for our young people, and these practices are driving down the use of harsh discipline methods that disproportionately impact youth of color,” said **Bessie Alcantara, MSW, Executive Director of Alternatives, Inc.**, one of CPS’s restorative practices providers. “The programming is valuable not only to students but also to educators, who receive ongoing professional development and support from our expert coaches.”

While RP policies have previously shown promising results regarding the relationship between RP and positive outcomes, this study fills a critical gap in the research by providing the first causal evidence of the effectiveness of RP in schools. Administrators can now take into consideration this extended analysis when implementing their own programs, particularly as schools continue to grapple with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic dramatically reduced in-classroom instruction and corresponded with an uptick in student disciplinary incidents. As schools now work to accelerate student learning, boost in-classroom instruction, and address students’ socio-emotional needs, RP programs may help to generate tangible, positive results.

“Our research shows that restorative practices can make a real, positive difference in addressing students’ socio-emotional needs,” said **Sadie Stockdale Jefferson, PhD, Executive Director of the University of Chicago Education Lab.** “We hope these findings inform how schools advance the health and success of students.”

This study was made possible by generous financial support from the Becker Friedman Institute for Economics at the University of Chicago, the National Academy of Education, the Spencer Foundation, the Successful Pathways from School to Work initiative of the University of Chicago funded by the Hymen Milgrom Supporting Organization, and the William T. Grant Foundation.

To read *From Retributive to Restorative: An Alternative Approach to Justice* by Anjali Adukia, PhD; Ben Feigenberg, PhD; and Fatemeh Momeni, PhD, please see [here](#).

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