

THE JUST DISCIPLINE PROJECT

2-YEAR REVIEW

2017-2019



University of Pittsburgh

School of Social Work, Center on Race & Social Problems

School of Education, Motivation Center

Background

In 2016-17, the University of Pittsburgh's Center on Race and Social Problems and Pitt's Motivation Center, with support from The Heinz Endowments, began collaborating with the Woodland Hills Intermediate School to implement the Just Discipline Project. The program is designed to support positive school climates and restorative discipline practices. After a period of planning and observation, the program started in earnest in the fall of 2017. What follows is a summary of the program results for the first two years of implementation.

Data Sources

- **School discipline data**
- **Student achievement data**
- **Student surveys**
- **Teacher surveys**
- **Teacher interviews**

Program Components

- **Community circles**
- **Healing circles**
- **School-wide community building**
- **Student leadership group**
- **Professional development**

SUSPENSIONS & REFERRALS

There have been substantial gains on discipline indicators over the time period of the program:

28%
fewer
individual
students
suspended

22%
decrease in
total
suspensions

30%
decrease in
total student
referrals

20%
fewer
individual
students
referred

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Student surveys highlight improving perceptions of key aspects of school climate, including:

19%

**improvement in
student perceptions
of safety**

Strengths

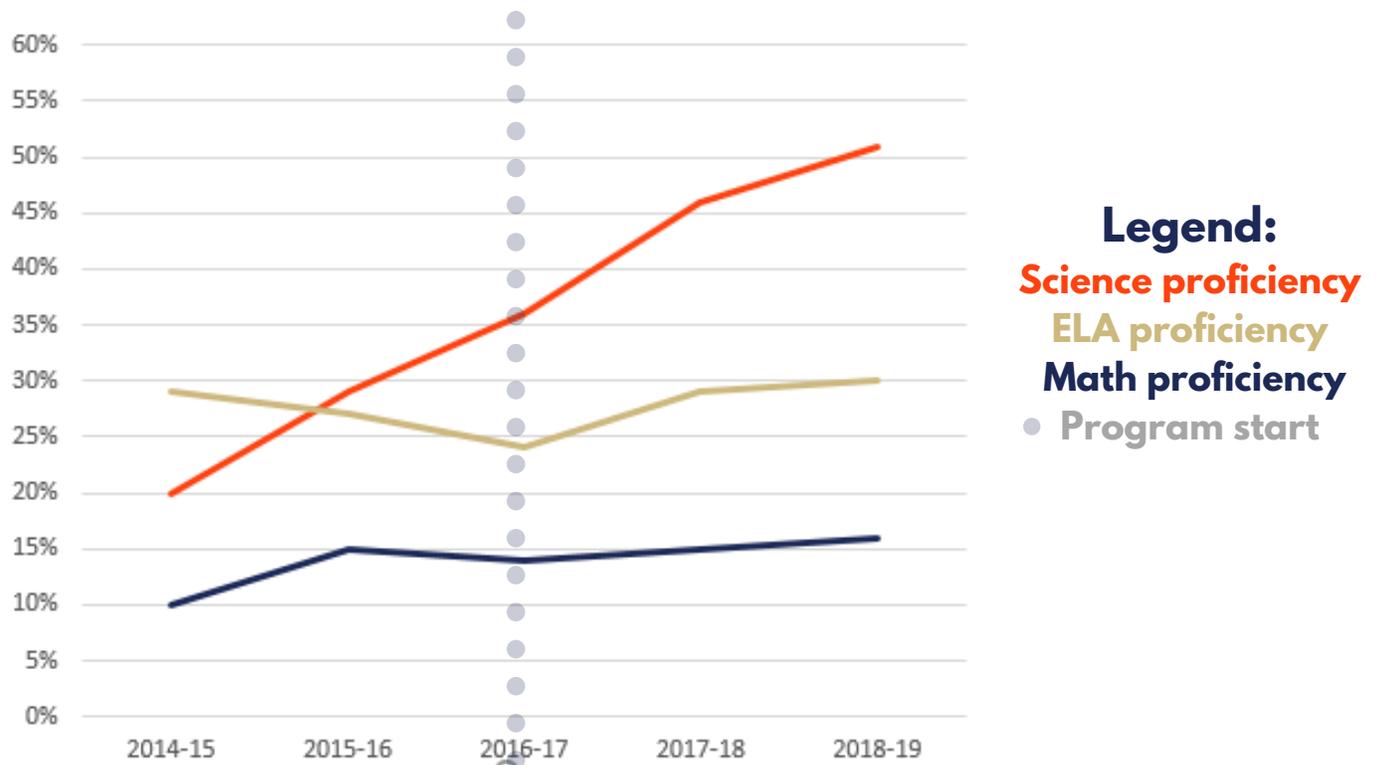
- Improved perceptions of teacher belief in their efforts
- Improved feelings of autonomy
- Improved feelings of students having a voice

Challenges

- Students rated their academic engagement lower than students did 2 years ago



Academic Outcomes



Since the start of the program in 2017, Woodland Hills Intermediate School has experienced academic gains in Math, Language Arts, and Science. Two of these gains reverse downward trends.



School Staff Perspectives

In interviews and surveys, teachers and staff have indicated several strengths and challenges of the program implementation.

Strengths

- **91% of teachers would like restorative practices to continue**
- **The restorative practice coordinator is an asset, building strong relationships with the students and resolving issues**
- **Community circles were widely used and have a strong effect**
- **Co-planning and co-facilitation of circles by faculty pairs works well**
- **The student leaders are very successful at engaging their peers and at helping to defuse conflicts**

Challenges

- **Restorative practices don't fix everything: Teachers felt that 2018-19 was still an especially difficult year for student behaviors**
- **Clearer and more consistent school-wide discipline policies are needed beyond restorative practices**
- **Resources for student services and holistic supports are far too limited**
- **School-wide activities have potential, but at times need to be more engaging**
- **More space and staff supports are needed to provide additional alternatives to out-of-school suspensions**

Restorative Voices

"Here at Woodland Hills Intermediate we are learning to solve our issues through talking it out with one another instead of fighting. **We hope to model that to our communities** and together create a better place for us to grow."

-6th grade student & "LIT Leader"

"Within my room, [students have] taken a **leadership role** where if they see somebody who's upset, they'll make an effort to go over and help them through a problem, or be a friend, or be empathetic... So they've taken a leadership role by being more accountable for their actions and the actions of others."

-4th grade teacher

"We cried during some of the circles, and the students were crying. Just seeing another student cry for another student that they hardly talked to, they would never get **that opportunity to see different sides of one another.**"

-6th grade teacher

"I think it's much more intentional the things that we're doing to **make sure that students know that we are there, we care about them,** not just to teach them, but them as human beings. "

-5th grade teacher

Next Steps

Build on Successes

- Increase the number of staff to reduce the student-to-restorative practices coordinator ratio (currently only 1 for 600 students)
- Provide professional development supports for additional schools
- Multi-site implementation with comparisons to test program effects

Continuous Improvement

- Increase the availability of restorative spaces and processes as alternatives to school suspensions
- Improve referral and reentry processes and discipline policy clarity
- Increase social and mental health supports for students in distress

Team

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The Just Discipline Project is a collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh's School of Social Work's Center on Race and Social Problems, the School of Education's Motivation Center, and the students, teachers, and leaders of the Woodland Hills School District.

