

— TOP TAKEAWAYS —

## Restorative Justice



### WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (RJ)?

- A 2014 “Dear Colleague” letter from the Department of Education under President Obama and civil rights investigations into schools encouraged the adoption of RJ reforms to address disparities in student discipline rates among racial groups.
- RJ seeks to replace traditional techniques, such as suspension, expulsion, and referral to law enforcement, with a focus on reconciliation between victims and aggressors.

### ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE HAS SUFFERED

- When disruptive students are not removed from the classroom, academic performance can suffer overall.
- Academic losses are not distributed evenly; The worst impact has been in schools that were already struggling to maintain order, and for low-income and minority students.
- Examples:
  - In Los Angeles, schools that reported more than 10 suspensions a year prior to reforms lost a full third of a year of learning.
  - In Pittsburgh, test scores for African-American students fell from the 50th to the 44th percentile after reforms.

### STUDENTS AND TEACHERS HAVE SAFETY CONCERNS

- Student surveys show increases in fights, disrespect, and drug and gang activity and that teachers are unable to protect them from bullies after reforms.
- Teachers also report worries about their safety while teaching. In one survey, 65 percent of teachers say RJ discipline reforms “don’t work.”
- Ironically, reforms can backfire: Due to a rise in more serious incidents, sometimes students ultimately spend more time suspended out of school than before.

### SOLUTION: PARENTS AND TEACHERS SHOULD SET DISCIPLINE POLICIES

- Parents and local school boards have a right to know about discipline reforms.
- Some states offer scholarships to students who are bullied or fear for their safety that allow them to attend a different school, whether public or private.
- Ultimately, all parents need school choice in order to force the system to take their voices and their children’s safety seriously. Research shows positive effects of school choice on school safety.

Read the **full policy focus** [here](#).