

Draft

RESTORE & RECONNECT - R & R

A Community Building and Restorative Strategy to Help Reduce Exclusionary Practices

I am pleased to introduce you to the concept of Restore and Reconnect (R &R) in New Haven Public Schools. The R&R space is both a virtual and on the ground community-building strategy offered by the Youth Family and Community Engagement (YFCE) team to address student needs and reduce and respond to student disengagement. This space is intended to assure that students at risk of disengagement are supported with evidenced based strategies during remote, hybrid school, full reopening and during afterschool. Restore and Reconnect represents an important and necessary shift from traditional models and help us in reducing the impact of exclusion. The impact of exclusion include loss of learning, school drop-out, and exposure to the juvenile justice system. (Losen et al., 2017) (Wymer et al., 2020).

Initially launched and studied in NHPS virtual summer program, the Restore and Reconnect model is embedded within the Restorative Practices component of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) with the lens on identifying and responding to students' needs as well as helping students develop and practice the SEL skills that promote positive relationship building and ethical decision making. Critically, R & R will help in identification of the students at most risk of behavior problems and respond with evidenced based interventions before problem behaviors occur (Health, 2013). I believe that the consistent practice of these skills through the use of restorative community building dialogue such as circles will result in overall positive school climate. (Brown, 2018)

Engaging students through community building gives them the coping mechanisms they need to more appropriately handle emotional triggers that lead to disengagement from school and other supportive communities. These circles also invite the group, adults included, to better understand the lens each participant is using to make sense of the world. The dialogues offer vital insight into the individual values that are shaped by needs and the experiences that produce behaviors that often result in conflict and/or disruption for both the school and the larger community. The information that arises from these circles is foundational to creating culturally competent responses and norms within the community. (Brown, 2018)

The Restore and Reconnect Room starts with the premise "Kids do well if they can" based on strategies in *Treating Explosive Kids* (Greene & Ablon, 2006) From this context, the goal of the adult is to identify what is in the child's way and to help the child find solutions for this obstacles.

Roll out plan:

To achieve a successful roll-out, my team and I will initiate the following framework;

1. In-School Suspension Workers will shift to *In-school Support* and become the first team of facilitators fully trained. All other youth development support staff are expected be trained by December 11, 2020.
2. Training with fidelity requires facilitators to participate in two 3-hour training sessions on restore and reconnect; they will be provided with a training manual to help them facilitate work.
3. Support staff can begin by identifying 3 to 15 students who might be at risk, before behaviors that disrupt learning occurs. Students must be invited in a non-judgmental, culturally competent manner to R and R.
4. Facilitators are trained to begin each day with a 20 to 30 minutes of community building using circles or schedule session as appropriate throughout the day
5. Facilitators are able keep space and virtual rooms open throughout the day for students to utilize when needed. Offer quick circles as needed throughout the day.
6. Utilize "sidebars" to invite students or allow students back to R and R as needed for supportive conversations.
7. Conduct end of day reflection session to connect with students. These reflections center around three basic themes; what needs did the students have that were not met during the day, what do the students need to be ready to arrive on time and ready to participate tomorrow, and what was good about their day.
8. Facilitators participate in ongoing coaching and PD sessions with peers and YFCE team.

Here is what the R and R Daily Community Building Sessions can accomplish:

ADULTS ARE ORIENTED TO:

- Be culturally competent
- Understand and appropriately respond to student needs
- Reflect on their own adult needs
- Use affective language to communicate the adult needs and model this for students
- Strengthen empathy for those within their community
- Use restorative strategies to build and strengthen community

STUDENTS ARE GUIDED IN:

- Establishing norms
- Owning their behavior
- Using affective language to be heard and to show genuine respect for peers and adults
- Assuring readiness to learn
- Building their own confidence in addressing real life problems
- Handling the triggers that lead to misconduct or disengagement from social and academic learning

Please reach out to me directly with questions and concerns

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