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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

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crisis of grave proportions. Zero-tolerance seems to clearly work to only further marginalize

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INTRODUCTION

is article attempts to address the dominant use of punitive approaches to issues of social behavior in schools, and to propose a restorative justice approach. In this rst section, the article discusses the problem of overuse of punitive approaches to dis cipline issues in schools in the country and the state of California. en it describes the

is table indicates the number of students suspended in 2011-2012 by ethnicity and in absolute numbers. Clearly, Latino (labeled Hispanic by the CDE) and Black students were suspended more than any other student group. e number of Latino students amounted to a total of 850, and the only group with two expelled students through the year. African American student suspensions reached a total of 36, and zero expulsions. Asian, the third group with high suspension numbers, accumulated a total of 24, zero expulsions. e main reason cited for sending Latino students home was de ance, while other reasons were cited for sending home the other groups. Yet, when the numbers above are translated into relative numbers, what we have is this:

Graph 1 Percentage of students relative to the total population by ethincity.
Source: California Department of Education (CDE), 2014.

Latino population (labeled Hispanic by the CDE) account for the staggering total of 850 suspensions, and Blacks for 36. When compared to any other ethnic group, in relative terms to the size representation, such numbers seem dramatic. For instance, the group labeled Asian makes 1,527 –or 11.8%– of the total district population, which is seven times more than that of African American-224 or 1.7% students, yet the Asians group was issued 1.5% of the total suspensions while Blacks received 16%. Our point here is to underline the fact of overrepresentation of Black students, in relatks for 9esm-8.6(s)0.5(t)65 1 Tf 0 3.1(m)(e)2.2(n)20.4(t)8(h9s)0.5(to 7

behavior, may or may not occur, since central to the prevailing approach is to

PARTICIPATION

To forge a restorative-justice culture in a school, the leadership generates the unequivocal expectation that when incidents happen, those involved will engage face-to-face in a restorative process. No exceptions allowed. Participants chie y include the person(s) directly a ected, and the o ender(s) –called here the protagonists– and the community.

Having the protagonists facing each other represents a precondition for restoration to take hold in a school and to become a cultural practice-how acts of injustice are addressed. is involvement contributes to building community capacity to directly engage con ict, to ground solutions within the community itself, and to increase understanding of the value of the non-punitive nature of restorative justice. Every time people participate in a restorative process, the school community –especially students and parents– grows mediation and negotiation skills; they also learn ownership of the process, as opposed to con ict addressed by experts. e restorative approach also makes justice a participatory endeavor.

Talking to each other face-to-face means that the perpetrator has a chance to explain what happened, how events unfolded. Telling the story of the o ense may help the perpetrator to understand individual responsibility, and eventually initiate a personal change. e victim, on the other hand, also has the opportunity to explain the hurt and its emotional rami cations. Explaining what was done to her or him, may allow also initiating a process of forgiveness.

e facilitator mediates the protagonists' face-to-face encounter and the involvement of witnesses and community members. In addition, facilitators' use of appropriate formats may help to create an inviting environment, far removed from the threat of punishment, blame, and guilt. Eventually this facilitation may enforce

TRUTHFULNESS

Stating and owning the truth governs restoration. At the core of a restorative process lies the expectation that all participants embrace truth telling as their moral compass. us, every single person involved knows that participation implies total honesty and transparency.

As a result, what is expressed in the restorative process is taken face value and considered vital for mapping the nature of an incident, for following its ramifications, and for searching solutions. Moreover, participants know that any deviation from the truth may, sooner or later, come back to hunt them; when this happens, social status within networks, as well as relationships in the larger community, will pro.7(o58 1 Tf -0.001 .4(u)1-5.6(y b(n)-9.5 4.8(n)20.4(t)-11(g i)19.)-2.7f4.2(t718.4