

# INSPIRING THE

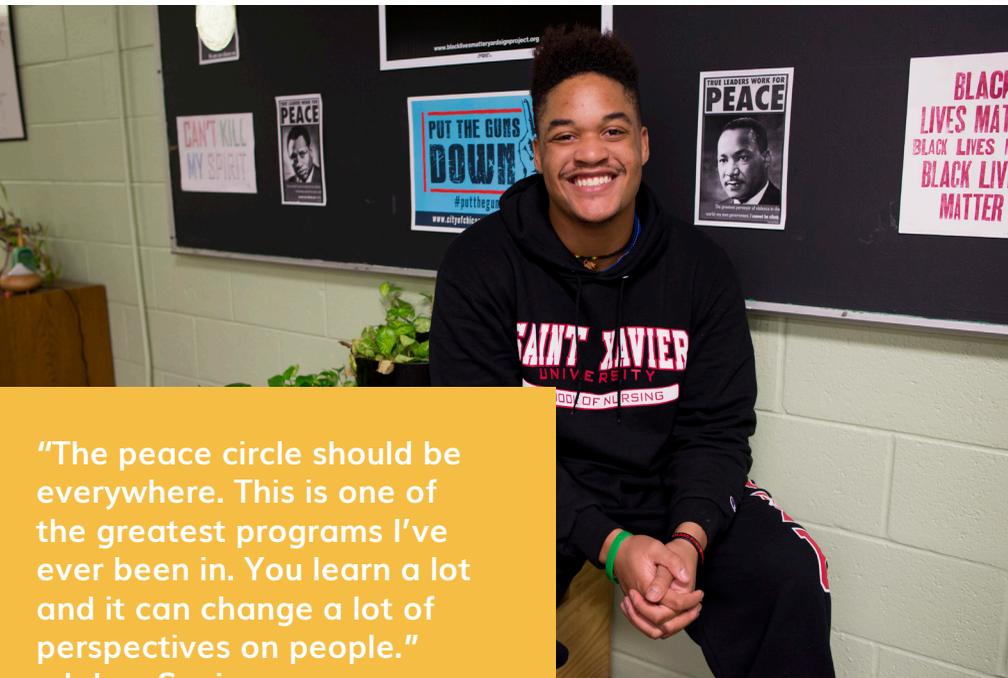


# FUTURE

CASE STUDY:  
Alternatives' Restorative Justice work  
at Paul Robeson High School 2014-2017



“ I think a lot of schools are missing out on the talents, skills, compassion, and energy of young people.  
-Michael Meyer, RJ Specialist ”



“The peace circle should be everywhere. This is one of the greatest programs I’ve ever been in. You learn a lot and it can change a lot of perspectives on people.”  
- Jalen, Senior, Paul Robeson H.S.

Alternatives’ youth inspire their peers, teachers, and families to do better and to do more for their communities. When young people’s voices are not only heard but also affirmed and uplifted, they become inspired to change the future.

Restorative Justice (RJ) work at Paul Robeson High School in Englewood began in 2014. Alternatives provided a peer conference training to students and our Restorative Justice Specialist, Michael Meyer, began providing coaching to school staff.

Based on this partnership, we were excited to intensify our work the following fall, embedding Michael in the school 4 days each week.

Alternatives’ Intensive RJ model utilizes a whole-school approach including:

- Classroom management strategies
- Talking circles to build relationships before conflicts arise
- Restorative conversations to immediately address conflicts
- Peace circles and peer conferencing to facilitate accountability and repair damaged relationships.

Youth leadership is a key component of this program, where students are trained as Peace Ambassadors to take part in resolving peer-to-peer conflict and build a peaceful and inclusive school culture.

We will continue our partnership with Robeson’s principal and staff who are dedicated to sustaining a restorative school culture. To support this effort, and share with other stakeholders and schools, we highlight the impact that Restorative Justice has made on the school and its students over time.

“The underlying theme is respect for others. Listening is the big skill we’re working on. The kids are learning to express themselves in an honest, sincere fashion.”  
– Robeson Teacher

“ When outside people come in, they can tell there’s a calm. You can see a little more respect for each other’s voice. ”  
– Principal Sevier

# THE WORK

Over this three year period, Alternatives has impacted 258 students and 56 teachers and school staff. Here is a summary of our work at Robeson:

- 7 all-staff trainings
- 36 technical assistance sessions with administrators
- 59 technical assistance sessions or classroom observations with teachers
- 175 classroom circles
- 109 other talking circles
- 266 restorative conversations to resolve issues
- 36 peer conferences or peace circles to resolve bigger conflicts
- 47 trainings for students serving as Peace Ambassadors
- 9 youth-led, school-wide events

This work has resulted in a major school climate shift from punitive to restorative. An administrator described the impact this way, **“Restorative Justice has done a great job. It’s changed the culture and the climate in the building. The expectations are different now.”**

In addition to changing the relationships between students and staff, it has actually impacted the relationships among teachers in the building. One teacher noted, **“I was skeptical about peace circles. I did not see their value until the end of last school year when we did a peace circle as teachers. The conversation, connectedness, and camaraderie that came out of it helped me to look at peers differently.”**

These changes can be seen in the school’s discipline data.\*

Using the 2012-13 school year as a baseline, Robeson has seen a **70% drop in its out-of-school suspension (OSS) rate.**

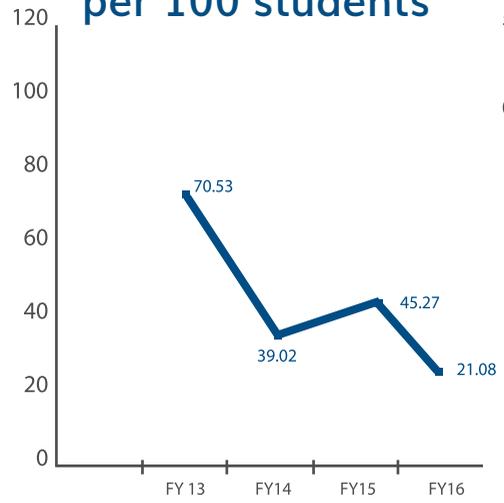
School suspensions are an ineffective approach to school discipline. They send the message that students are not welcome; they don’t address the root cause of the issue; and students miss critical instructional and learning time.

Research has proven that school suspensions contribute immensely to the widely known phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline, an epidemic plaguing American schools – where Black students are three and a half times more likely to be suspended than White students, and students who have been suspended are more likely to be incarcerated in the future.

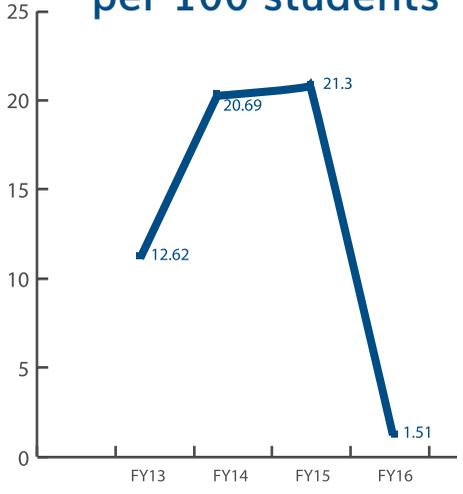
Many schools, including Robeson, have police officers stationed in the building. During this four-year period, Robeson has been assigned two police officers and police notifications reached a peak at 21.3 per 100 students in FY15.

Due to its more restorative culture, during the 2015-16 school year, Robeson had its lowest rate of police notifications at just 1.5 per 100 students. This was an amazing 93% drop from the previous year.

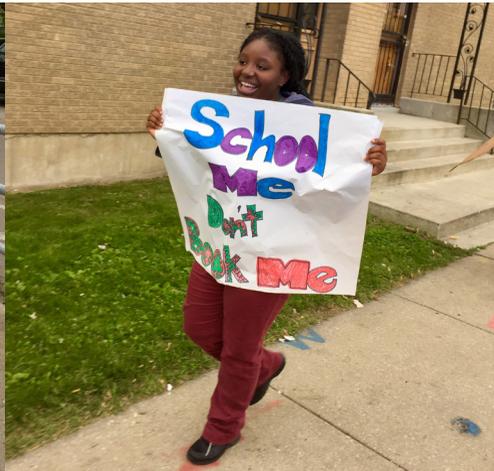
## Out-of-School Suspension per 100 students



## Police Notifications per 100 students



\*all school discipline data from the Chicago Public Schools



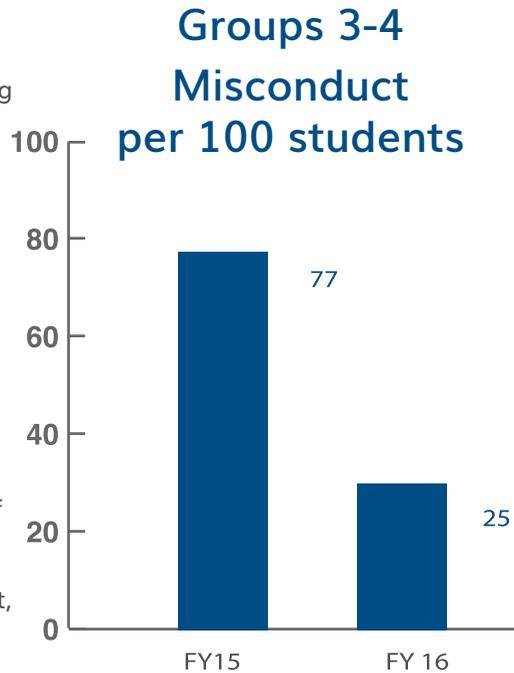
Robeson has moved toward restorative justice practices which is a substantial shift away from using out-of-school suspensions and calling police to discipline students.

**How does this impact student behavior?**

From FY15 to FY16, Robeson saw a 39% reduction in behavioral misconducts from a rate of 153 to 93 incidents per 100 students.

Impressively, the biggest rate reduction came in Group 3 and Group 4 misconducts: a 67% reduction from FY15 to FY16 (rate of 77 per 100 students down to a rate of 25). Group 3 and 4 misconducts include physical fights, bullying, theft, assault, and battery.

This means that not only were students pushed out of school less often, their behavior and safety also significantly improved.



**School discipline data matches up with our internal program evaluation data.**

- 91% of participants at Robeson improved communication skills with both peers and adults.
- 85% of participants improved their problem-solving skills.
- 84% of participants learned how to resolve conflicts peacefully with family, friends, and teachers.
- 73% of teachers reported that they used restorative approaches when a student was disrespectful.
- 100% of teachers gained a positive awareness of the school's restorative justice activities.
- 100% of students felt that the restorative approach helped them take responsibility for their actions.

These significant school culture changes have had a positive effect on the following:

- Relationships between students, teachers, school staff, and administrators
- Peer relationships among students
- Peer relationships among teachers and school personnel
- Relationships between students and police officers, and school security
- Increasing Teacher's empathy for students with regards to the daily challenges they face

We asked students to reflect on what they have taken away from the program:

“ ...being able to speak and actually being heard. ”



“...learning to problem solve with different people”

“ I learned how to work with others to achieve/ accomplish a goal. ”

Alternatives, Inc. pioneered restorative justice practices in the Chicago Public Schools, leading the way with the very first high school peer jury in 1996. Our Restorative Justice program has provided RJ training, technical assistance, and youth programming to over 65 schools across the city, other school districts in Illinois, and to several community-based organizations across Chicago.

Alternatives empowers young people and adults to become co-leaders in implementing and sustaining a process of building community and supporting young people as they create the future.



[www.alternativesyouth.org](http://www.alternativesyouth.org)