Newtown Middle School Characteristics

Large Suburban Middle School
GRADES 7–8
52 Teachers
861 Students
- Grade 7: 437
- Grade 8: 424

Source: NCES Kids’ Zone, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

Newtown Middle School Data

Student Suspensions in 2 School Years by Days of Suspension

Disciplinary Infractions by Type in 3 School Years (part 1)
Disciplinary Infractions by Type in 3 School Years (part 2)

Source: Richard J. Hollahan, principal, Newtown Middle School, February 2009
Palisades High School was the first International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) SaferSchools pilot school. Restorative practices was introduced in the 1998–1999 school year. David Piperato, former Palisades H.S. principal, said that before the program was introduced, as in many public schools throughout the U.S., the level of caring and respect among many students had declined. Restorative practices, he said, “created a more positive relationship between staff and students.”

In fall 1998, the school launched a new program, the Academy, for students who didn’t feel connected to school and were struggling with behavior or academics. Said Piperato, “We had addressed the content of the program, not relationships between teachers and students.” Consequently, the program was a disaster. Rebelling against the lack of structure, unmotivated kids roamed the building, their behavior rude and belligerent. Teachers turned on each other, frustrated and upset.

The IIRP taught the Academy staff to employ the continuum of restorative practices, starting with affective statements and questions — sharing and eliciting emotions — to help students understand that they were as responsible for the success of the Academy, as well as to and for each other, as the teachers were. The teachers learned how to use circles, interventions, one-on-ones and group meetings with students. They introduced “check-in” and “check-out” circles at the beginning and end of each class — for students to set goals and expectations together.

The strategies quickly started to show results with Academy students, even those no one had been able to reach before. The administration decided to phase in restorative practices in the rest of the school over a three-year period. All teachers were encouraged to use restorative practices in the classroom. Data gathered by the school indicate a clear decrease in discipline problems.

Restorative practices had a positive effect on academic performance as well. Said Piperato, “You cannot separate behavior from academics. When students feel good and safe and have solid relationships with teachers, their academic performance improves.”

Restorative practices also helped establish a culture of collaboration among staff members, where teachers discuss students’ behavior, rather than their personalities, and brainstorm as a group about how to handle it. Said Academy teacher John Venner, “You never talked to another teacher about how they talked to kids. It was their own damn business in their own classroom. Now we find it very acceptable to hold each other accountable.”

**Palisades High School Characteristics**

**Rural Fringe High School**

**Grades 9–12**

52 Teachers

743 Students

- Grade 9: 175
- Grade 10: 198
- Grade 11: 205
- Grade 12: 165

**Source:** NCES Kids’ Zone, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

**Palisades High School Data**

**Disciplinary Referrals to Student Office in 4 School Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998–1999</td>
<td>1752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–2000</td>
<td>1426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2001</td>
<td>1410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2002</td>
<td>1154</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Student Detentions by Type in 4 School Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Detentions</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detentions Assigned by Teachers</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Disruptive Behavior in 4 School Years

Out-of-School Suspensions in 4 School Years

Restorative practices was introduced at Palisades Middle School (PALMS) in fall 2000. Previously the school climate was discourteous and disrespectful and altercations were common. PALMS principal Edward Baumgartner said, “We were suspending 200 students a school year for everything from disrespect to not making up gym.” All staff were trained in restorative practices, including support staff.

Restorative practices is used in classrooms in the form of circles, where students and staff share information and problems. In discipline situations, students write in their personal journals, kept in the student office, about what happened and suggest how to take care of it. The entire continuum of restorative practices is also employed, from affective statements and questions to formal restorative conferences.

The school has seen a statistically significant decrease in the amount of problems that occur each day. Data gathered by PALMS indicate a substantial drop from school year 2000–2001 to 2001–2002 in discipline problems and incidents of fighting. Restorative practices has also had a positive effect on academic performance, said Baumgartner.

“I’ve gotten more out of my students with this approach than I did with a more rigid approach to discipline problems. When you solve problems with them rather than coming down from ‘on high’ they buy into it much better.”

— Fran Ostrosky, longtime PALMS teacher and president of the Palisades Education Association (teachers’ union)

“I used to get in a lot of trouble, but teachers talk to students and help you make the right decisions here. In homeroom we sit in a circle and talk about anything that needs to be brought up.”

— Eighth-grade girl

“I used to be one of these black and white, law and order guys. Kids had to be held accountable and the only way to do that was to kick them out of school — to show the other kids that you’re the boss. That doesn’t work. I didn’t solve problems; I just postponed them until they got to high school. Restorative practices works. We now fix and solve problems.”

— Edward Baumgartner, principal

Palisades Middle School Characteristics

Rural Fringe Middle School

Grades 6–8
37 Teachers
529 Students
  › Grade 6: 179
  › Grade 7: 176
  › Grade 8: 174

Source: NCES Kids’ Zone, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

Palisades Middle School Data

Disciplinary Referrals to Student Office in 2 School Years

![Bar chart showing number of disciplinary referrals from 2000-2001 and 2001-2002.]

Disciplinary Referrals to Student Office in 2 School Years by Referral Source

![Bar chart showing disciplinary referrals by source for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002.]

Springfield Township is in the first ring of suburbs around Philadelphia. The school district receives many urban transfer students and has a mobile student body. The administration believes the students are more “street smart” than traditional suburban students.

Joseph Roy became principal of Springfield Township High School in January 2000. The entire Springfield faculty was introduced to restorative practices in fall 2001. Data gathered by the school since restorative practices was introduced indicate decreases in discipline problems, disrespect and defiance.

The challenge at Springfield, said Roy, has been to integrate students from different systems into the culture of the school, rather than let the culture of the school shift toward the disruptive and unruly. Roy said that restorative practices had definitely helped that concern. “Usually kids will catch onto ‘OK, this is how we behave at this school, this is what the expectations are and this is the culture’ and they get on board,” he said.

Prior to restorative practices, students were kicked out of class and sent to a “time-out room.” “Sometimes they’d get there, sometimes they wouldn’t,” said Roy. “If they got there they just hung out. There was no follow-up.”

Now during in-school suspensions, assistant principal Michael Kell gives each student a list of questions to think about: What happened? Who do you think has been affected by your actions? What can you do to repair the harm? He discusses the questions with the student and often brings in the teacher involved to talk about how everyone feels and help mend relationships. Kell also facilitates formal restorative conferences when serious problems arise, as does guidance counselor Kevin McGeehan.

Staff employ a restorative approach in everyday interactions with students. “When I see a kid acting up in the hallway, instead of dragging him into the discipline office, I’ll pull him over, one-on-one, and try to understand where he’s coming from,” said McGeehan.

Teachers use check-in and check-out circles with both classroom management and academic issues to “create the culture that says, ‘We talk about stuff as a group and we help each other out,’” said Roy. He considers restorative practices to be part of culture building, including treating kids with respect and having a team of teachers and parents identify the school’s core values. “It’s all part of restorative practices.” Said Roy, “When you get to the point where it’s informal but constant, that’s where you want to be.”

**Springfield Township High School Characteristics**

**Large Suburban High School**

- **Grades**: 8–12
- **68 Teachers**
- **834 Students**
  - Grade 8: 154
  - Grade 9: 159
  - Grade 10: 157
  - Grade 11: 200
  - Grade 12: 164

**Source:** NCES Kids’ Zone, nces.ed.gov/nceskids/tools/index.asp, February 2009

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**Springfield Township High School Data**

**Incidents of Inappropriate Behavior in 2 School Years**

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<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2002</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Classroom Incidents by Type in 2 School Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Incident</th>
<th>2000–2001</th>
<th>2001–2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disrespect to Teachers</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Disruptions</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>