

White Paper

Prepared by Lighthouse Academies on the benefits and costs of restorative approaches in charter schools (reducing unnecessary out of school suspensions).

Lighthouse Academies: A Case for Restorative Action

Why Use a Restorative Approach? Here is Why.

On a Tuesday, five students got into an altercation (we can call it a fight) coming into their school building in Gary, Indiana. The altercation occurred because one young man robbed the home of two other students the previous weekend. This Tuesday was the first time the students had seen each other since the robbery. Needless to say, there were issues getting in the way of learning on this day.

As the school processed the incident and informed families, one of the parents became irate and spoke of taking violence into the neighborhood as a justified reaction. Staying true to a restorative approach to all inappropriate behaviors (adult and student), families and their children were called to a restorative circle the following day.

In the (70 minute) restorative circle all families and students talked about what happened, why it happened, and the mistakes that were made. The father of the boys whose house was robbed forgave the other young man and offered him fatherly advice for the future.

At one point in the circle one of the students was asked why he felt that he had to attack or resort to violence when he thought his friend was in danger (he saw the fight occurring on Tuesday morning and got involved). His answer was, "When I leave this building, I have the mentality that I might not make it. It is hard for me to turn that off and on when I enter and leave school." The families gave him advice and support on how to reconsider his views on personal safety. At the end of the circle all students and families stood and came together. The "fighters" banded together and restored school arrival safety by forming a temporary greeting committee to welcome all students into the school in the AM. They demonstrated community and in return were granted forgiveness. They made restitution.

This story gets even better. At the end of another day that week, two of the students (robbery victims a.k.a. school fighters) were seen in the hall after school getting missing assignments from teachers. When asked how they planned to get home, they indicated that their parent was waiting in the office. In another hallway, the young man who had robbed the home of his peers was also getting assignments. When asked the same question, he replied that he was getting a ride home from the family he had robbed.

Not Giving Up. Really Not Giving Up.

Around three years ago, Lighthouse took a hard look at suspension rates and academic outcomes and became determined to do the hard work of changing our practices to better support our students from a whole-child perspective. Though we have more work to do our educators and principals have reduced suspension rates network-wide by 80% in just two years. Having reached that initial goal, a new 2016-2017 goal has been established: further reduce out of school suspensions by another 80%. Our ultimate goal: No student who attends a Lighthouse Academy will be suspended out of school.

Number of Students Suspended		
Lighthouse School	2013-2014	2015-2016
Gary Lighthouse College Prep Academy	1039	136
Indianapolis Lighthouse Charter School (K-6)	158	6
Indianapolis College Prep Academy	145	49
Pine Bluff Lighthouse Charter School	141	6
Bronzeville Lighthouse Charter School	160	9

This chart displays just one representation of suspension rates across our network. It does not account for multiple same-student suspensions for especially challenged students and does not represent the thousands of lost instructional hours and hundreds of lost days of learning. Those numbers are staggering.

Why is This Paper Important?

Given that one in three black American males will be incarcerated, at LHA we cannot wait for criminal justice reform. We accept our responsibilities to do our part to turn off the tap of the school to prison pipeline. We acknowledge that we operate in an authorizer established system of accountability, in an environment where we are externally judged. While we work diligently to improve the academic growth and achievement of our schools and each of our scholars, we will not rest until our network turnaround efforts result in increased academic *and* social-emotional learning for every child.

We are not evaluated by our convictions, however. Regardless, we remain true to them. Being true to our convictions, even if there are no recognized rewards for doing so, means that we serve every child and attempt to make a difference one child at a time. We meet every child with increased opportunity, customized interventions, and love.

How do we do our work? Here is a list of what we don't do:

- We don't interact with students as if we are "authority".
- We don't give demerits.
- We don't punish.

Here is what we do:

- We speak with respect and caring.
- We motivate with goal achievement and recognition of accomplishment.
- We nurture.

How Can Others Begin to do What We're Doing?

Establishing a public school system committed to keeping students in school while implementing a restorative approach is challenging but highly rewarding work. Take these twelve giant steps forward. We call these The BIG 12.

THE BIG TWELVE

1. Acknowledge and change practices that do not serve students well. This work starts with honest examination of current reality and digging deep to find the courage to name and change practices that do not benefit students.
2. Challenge long held perceptions about school "safety". This will make some members of schools and surrounding communities uncomfortable. Myths like: "we need to send a message" or "we need to make an example of..." must be identified for what they are. There is no data to support that schools are safer if we suspend students. Suspension is not a deterrent for students who are most likely to be suspended.
3. Screen for and hire teachers and leaders who demonstrate empathy (present real and gritty scenarios where patience and grace can be explored) in the hiring process. Once you think you have found someone with the right mindset push even harder. Role-play to find the breaking point and then evaluate whether they demonstrate the right level of compassion and conviction.
4. Communicate expectations clearly. Given the urgency to respond to student needs we cannot be held back by slow adopters. We cannot hold back on supporting students because their leaders and teachers cannot accept a new mindset about the value of relationship, restoration, and restitution.
5. Move forward regardless of the readiness of slow adopters/adapters. These people will see how new approaches work and elect to "get on the bus" or exit.
6. Train on proactive behavioral response. Clearly communicate the expectation for 80% proactive responses to 20% reactive strategies in classrooms. This shift moves the focus from students and their behaviors to teachers

and their ability to work with students.

7. Replace outdated and ineffective zero tolerance behavior management systems with zero tolerance for reluctance to build supportive relationships within the school.
8. Ensure leaders at the top of the organization/school are fully committed and modeling. Everyone must walk the talk.
9. Form support teams to problem-solve and think through alternatives to suspension.
10. Consider that it is not skill that allows us to challenge traditional approaches to managing student behavior. It is will. Live by “where there is a will there is a way.”
11. Teach adults and students the steps and methods of repair and restoration. Replace the most commonly posed question, “Why did you do that?!” with what we call the Supportive Six:

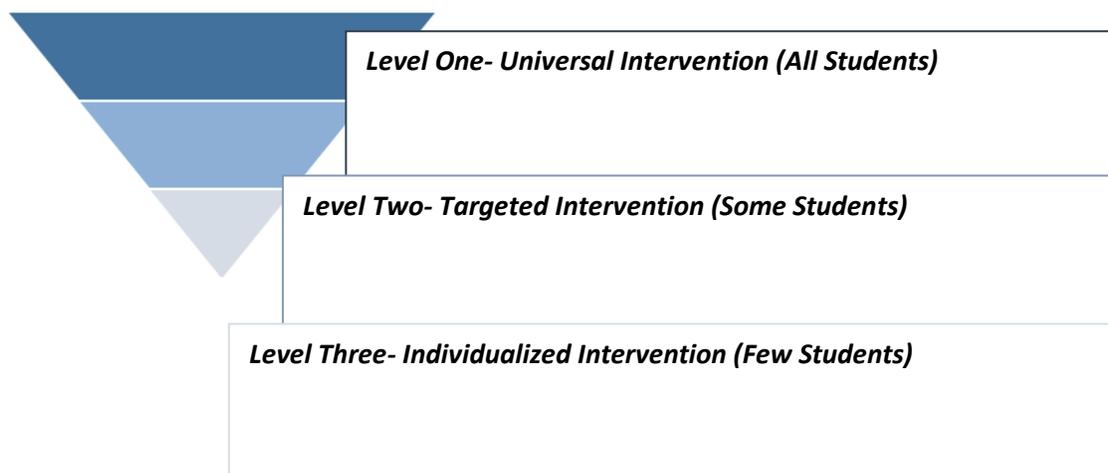
The Supportive Six

- “What happened?”
 - What were you thinking about at the time?
 - What have your thoughts been since?
 - Who has been affected by what you did?
 - In what way have they been affected?
 - What do you think you need to do to make things right?
12. Adopt explicit Multi-Tier Support Services (MTSS) approaches. See a LHA sample below.

Lighthouse Academies Intervention Tiers and Responses

To build self-management and self-regulation skills, we use a three-tiered approach to support students in making appropriate choices. ALL students benefit from Level One interventions which focus on building a healthy classroom and school community. Some students, who are not responsive to Level One interventions, will participate in Level Two interventions and support. Level Three intervention is reserved for the few students who do not respond to Level One and Two interventions and supports. These students need the most from us.

Three Levels of Intervention



Level One- Universal Interventions

Include:

- Clearly stated expectations that are applied to all students in an environment of relationship and caring.
- Classroom communities built through intentional teaching of social/emotional skills.
- Acknowledgement of positive behavior and celebrations of student achievement and goal attainment.

Examples of Level One interventions would be: Social/emotional curriculum, Morning Meeting or Circle of Power and Respect, Town Hall meeting, or Advisory.

Level Two- Targeted Interventions

Focus on:

- Specific interventions for students who do not respond to universal (Level One) efforts.
- Targeted support groups of students who require additional time and attention.
- Individual goal setting.
- Facilitated meetings between teachers and students to cement positive relationship.

Examples of level Two interventions would be: parent/guardian support conference, conflict resolution, peer mediation, restorative circle, or short-term goals and progress reporting.

Level Three- Intensive Individualized Interventions

Focus on:

- The needs of individual students who exhibit a pattern of problem behavioral actions.
- Students who do not easily trust or build relationships.
- Diminishing problem behaviors and increasing the student's social skills and functioning.
- Interventions involving functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans.

Examples of Level Three interventions would be: Student is supported with in-school restoration sessions, connections to social service agencies, 1-1 daily check ins, highly specific behavioral contracts with incentives, rewards and celebrations.

Can We Afford this Investment?

The currency required to a more effective approach in managing difficult students is empathy and teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships. Schools that decide to approach every student with understanding, patience, and grace do not require costly training sessions, lock step discipline guides, or additional staffing. At LHA, we are teaching ourselves new skills for interacting with students and are not investing in traditional policies on how to discipline students. We are certain that we will help ourselves build better relationships with our students and that students will respond positively with supportive treatment. We acknowledge that punitive mindsets present unsurmountable barriers to students who instead need to know that there are people at school who understand, hold high expectations, and care enough to invest sufficiently to help them develop social skills as well as academic ones. At LHA, we view disciplining students as an opportunity to build better relationships with students and that students are capable of responding in kind.

We Pose the Following Question:

What if every student learned to read, write, think mathematically, think critically, AND to interact successfully in times of stress, frustration, disappointment, anger, and in the midst of injustice?

At Lighthouse Academies, we are in the business of improving academic outcomes with equal attention paid to the social/emotional skills of the students we serve. This double investment is not without sacrifice. Time spent helping a second grader understand why hitting hurts others and himself takes away from teaching this same student how to read challenging academic material. We would prefer a laser-like focus on teaching and learning but have seen that our students, and frankly students in nearly every American school, need more. We are proud to choose to truly serve the whole child regardless of the cost. And actually, there is has been no cost related to achievement results. In the two years we have chosen to keep students in school, we have simultaneously implemented more rigorous curricula and have not seen further academic decline.

The state test score accountability movement has tended to focus on academic aspects of success, such as content knowledge, standardized growth measures, and the “mastery” of state standards. However, we recognize this is not sufficient. If students are to achieve their potential, they must have opportunities to engage and develop a much richer set of skills.

Every LHA teacher and leader has two jobs. One is to teach academic content and related skills and the other is to manage conversations and situations where students experience the triumph of compromise, negotiation, mediation, restitution and grace.

By accepting that our job is dual-fold, we have chosen to honor each student and commit to their wholeness. We refuse to give in to pressures that imply that there is only so much a school can do. We intend to do it all.

What is the opposite of not giving in? Not giving up? Not turning a blind eye? These questions are posed in relation to helping ALL public school students succeed, even those hardest to reach and teach.

The opposite of not giving up is investing in and refusing to abdicate our responsibilities to teach each individual child ALL the skills necessary to navigate their current world and personal circumstances and to be fully prepared for the worlds they do not yet know.

The opposite of not giving up is moving towards. It is pulling in struggling students not pushing them away. It amounts to investing in people of all ages. Some of the people we invest in work in our schools, some are students and others are their family members. The investment is not financially expensive. It costs next to nothing. The primary investment is deeply rooted caring, compassion, patience, grace, and forgiveness and acquired skill in leading dialogue that results in change of behaviors and attitudes.

The opposite of not giving up is accepting that it is each of us who determines our actions and reactions. It is not some distant bureaucracy, not a lock step disciplinary code, not external expectations for what schools should look like and sound like.

The opposite of not giving up means we do not purge students from our schools; we do not council out. All students are a fit at LHA. We accept all students and work with all students to teach them the soft skills they will need in schools, in their neighborhoods, when they hold jobs, and when they raise their own families. Most the students we serve come to school ready to learn; they have been emotionally nurtured and physically fed. However, some come to us (and to many other schools across America) with social and emotional barriers that require attention and acceptance. We accept students as they are and provide the support and guidance they will need to move from distraction and disengagement to the full expression of self, connectedness to school, and the promise of education.

In summary, we believe if not us, then who? LHA holds it head high as we attempt to break the school to prison pipeline in the most incarcerated nation on the planet. This could be a big win for all of us. Please support us in these efforts.

Today Is the Day We All Can Make It Happen!

ABOUT LHA

Who are we?

We are a national nonprofit network of charter schools. We are a growing community of approximately 7,500 students and families and approximately 825 teachers, principals and staff members currently operating academies in New York, Indiana, Illinois, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. We are a community dedicated to ensuring a college education for a population of students who would otherwise face a future with limited opportunity. We operate in under-resourced environments where most our students and families experience economic disadvantage.

Mission

We prepare our students for college and career through a rigorous arts-infused program.

Vision

All students will be taught by a highly effective teacher in a nurturing environment and will achieve at high levels. Each student will develop the knowledge, skills and values necessary for responsible citizenship and life-long learning. The impact of our collective efforts will change our schools and then fundamentally change public education.

We are committed to addressing the needs of students who struggle with adversity. Our team will do whatever it takes to improve the outcomes for low-income children. Our aim: to reduce class-based achievement gaps with compassion and high expectations and a resolve to educate students with grace and dignity. We treat and teach our students in ways that all students should experience public schooling. To do this, we aim to change the environment in America's public schools. We aim to be the light, to pioneer the practices associated with serving every student every day.