

Voluntary Policy Guidance
For [Name of School]

Elevate Restorative Justice Policy Initiative

Drafted by the LGBTQ Center OC's Department of Advocacy, Education, and Youth Programs
In Alignment with the Elevate Program

GUIDANCE IN RELATION TO LAUNCHING A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE ABOUT PROVIDING POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES REGARDING SUBSTANCE USE AND/OR POSSESSION

[Name of School] understands that student achievement begins with providing students with a safe, supportive, and affirming classroom. It is necessary to promote a healthy school environment conducive to learning and free from disruption. This kind of environment is committed to closing the achievement gap by providing access to education that ensures all students will graduate college-prepared and career-ready.

Research demonstrates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are at an increased risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, substance use, and sexual risk behaviors. Additionally, LGBTQ youth are reported to experience higher rates of victimization, bullying, and verbal and physical harassment in school. When it comes to substance use, LGBTQ youth reportedly experience higher rates of substance use in an effort to cope with minority stress, rejection, and hostile environments at school and at home.

Further research reveals that LGBTQ youth experience higher rates of interaction with punitive actions and more severe forms of punishment in comparison to their heterosexual peers. Harsh school discipline places LGBTQ youth, students of color, and other marginalized students at risk for serious educational consequences, such as academic disengagement, failure, push-out, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. When related to substance use, punishment often negatively impacts LGBTQ youth from getting the support that they need towards recovery and care.

[Name of School] endorses the belief that “Restorative Justice Practices” and comprehensive support services among students will positively impact Santa Ana Unified School District’s [Dropout Prevention Administrative Regulation 5147](#).

[Name of School] is recommending realignment of school resources to promote a framework of fair and equitable practices that are restorative in nature. Said framework will support students, teachers, administrators, parents, caregivers, guardians, and district leadership in reducing racial, ethnic, social, socioeconomic, and any other protected class disparities in school discipline, including suspension and expulsion.

[Name of School] is committed to creating and supporting a culture shift where the school systematically responds to student discipline problems by moving toward restorative and healthy approaches, which reintegrate and uplift rather than exclude.

[Name of School] is invested in adopting restorative practices that are inclusive of the experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ students and students of color, providing support through the means of LGBTQ student support, mental health programs, school climate interventions, violence prevention programs, substance use prevention programs, and other existing strategies designed to offer healthy alternatives to suspension and/or expulsion.

In relation to mental health support services, restorative justice practices encourage a trauma-informed approach by addressing underlying issues of students. This includes offering mental health counseling, process groups, and student support services for students who are most in need, such as LGBTQ students and students of color. Restorative discipline rests upon a continuum of age-appropriate interventions that include reinforcement, support, re-teaching opportunities, and family and community conferencing to increase student repertoires of effective responses.

[Name of School] is committed to investing in restorative justice practices to increase classroom learning and teaching by minimizing misconduct and creating a holistic support system, which is built on consistent and effective classroom management supported by a positive, trauma-informed, and inclusive school climate.

[Name of School] understands the need to continuously provide students with positive and healthy alternatives to suspension and expulsion through LGBTQ student support, mental health programs, school climate interventions, violence prevention programs, substance use prevention programs, and other existing strategies.

[Name of School] hereby launches a school-wide Elevate Restorative Justice Initiative, which will redesign existing school discipline structures and practices to promote positive and healthy alternatives to suspension. These efforts will create and sustain a safe, supportive, and equitable learning environment where all students—including LGBTQ students and students of color—are cared for and can excel.