

Investing in Restorative Justice & Healing-Centered Schools

Policy Demands from On Our Terms

On Our Terms lays out a vision for what restorative justice and healing-centered schools can and should look like, according to school communities already deeply engaged in this work. Yet, we know that restorative justice has never been fully funded or supported, and there is only so much that members of school communities can do on their own. The changes we need are structural, requiring bold leadership from policymakers and other government officials—and the power of youth, their families, and educators organizing together, demanding nothing short of the transformational change we deserve. We need cross-cutting policy changes in order to ensure all young people in NYC have a chance to learn and grow in restorative, healing-centered schools.

The researchers of this project—students, parents, and educators of New York City—call on the Mayor of New York City to fund and support the Department of Education to carry out the following demands. They have been created through hours of storytelling and research, diving into the challenges and opportunities of what it might take to bring student, parent, and educator-led restorative justice and healing-centered practices into schools. Taking a critical look at staffing, training, and resource allocation, these demands highlight important policy shifts that would pave the way for community-led efforts for safety, accountability, and healing in schools, and moving away from existing systems of policing, control, and surveillance. This is what restorative justice looks like, when it's On Our Terms.

Hire New Yorkers: Restorative Justice Comes from Our Communities

To build restorative justice practices across a community, it takes a community. For restorative justice to thrive across schools, we must ensure schools have the human resources needed to make the broad culture shift from punitive to healing-centered practice possible. We must better compensate and honor the frequently unpaid or underpaid youth, educators, and support staff already leading this work in schools, and hire more New Yorkers to ensure school communities have all the people power they need.

- ▶ Fund positions that develop community and restorative practices in every school, including restorative justice coordinators, social workers, guidance counselors, and other support staff (e.g., community assistant, paraprofessionals) as determined by the school community,

ensuring that all students have access to such support staff. These should be permanent positions with long-term funding sources to avoid frequent, disruptive staff turnover.

- ▶ Increase recruitment and expand access to employment opportunities for BIPOC applicants across all DOE jobs—from admin to paraprofessionals, educators to social workers, restorative justice coordinators to community safety workers—with the ultimate goal of smaller class sizes and New York City schools that better reflect the diversity of our students and their communities.
- ▶ Create community safety worker positions within schools that are not employed by the NYPD and that do not have a policing role, responsible for violence prevention and responses in school communities; such a program might be modeled after community violence interrupters or credible messenger initiatives.
- ▶ Compensate youth-led restorative justice in schools, via stipends and/or credit-bearing internships.
- ▶ Develop a Restorative Justice Jobs Pipeline for recent NYC schools alumni, creating a supportive pathway to hire former students as well-paid restorative justice school staff and/or facilitating access to relevant college coursework.
- ▶ Support and compensate staff in fostering youth leadership and social-emotional skills, via advisory or other classes (not as unpaid, add-on responsibilities).

End Cookie Cutter Trainings: Restorative Justice Education is a Community Undertaking

Widely-accessible and ongoing education and reflection about restorative justice encourages continuous growth and development within school communities. Moving beyond professional development as usual, we need more holistic, democratic training that builds on the expertise of existing staff, student, and parent practitioners and leaders. Such community education efforts would foster understanding about restorative philosophy and practices, introducing restorative justice as an approach to school culture, rather than just a response to harm. This model of community education would also support those engaged in restorative justice to continually come together to reflect, learning from personal experience and each other, while deepening and honing skills and practices.

- ▶ Provide and fund restorative justice training for all DOE staff, as well as student and parent leaders in school communities and in citywide positions, including intergenerational training experiences.
- ▶ Fund and support current student and staff practitioners in schools to lead the city’s restorative justice education efforts, rather than solely relying on outside trainers.

- ▶ Fund and prioritize youth-led restorative justice training and support for other young people (i.e., [Student Success Center Model](#)), and create opportunities for youth input in training for adults, with compensation via stipends or credit-bearing internships.
- ▶ Make restorative justice circle keeper training accessible to all DOE staff, as well as student and parent leaders in school communities or citywide positions.
- ▶ Ensure that restorative justice training offers a holistic, intersectional approach for school culture, not just as an “alternative to suspension.” Specifically, it should: emphasize the role of community building and prevention; integrate an anti-oppression and anti-racist lens about the origins of restorative justice and its use in schools; and interrogate power dynamics within schools that may pose barriers to building restorative school cultures (e.g., adult - student hierarchy).
- ▶ Mandate anti-racism training for all DOE staff, and make it widely accessible to students and parents. Restorative justice staff and administrators should receive additional, intensive training about using restorative justice to address racist or other identity-based harm in schools.
- ▶ Ensure that citywide restorative justice training efforts build upon and integrate other staff training on anti-oppression frameworks, trauma-informed pedagogy, and culturally-sustaining curriculum—all of which enhance the capacity of staff and schools to understand and address student needs, and respond to interpersonal and institutional harm in schools.

Invest in Safe Schools: Healing Takes Time and Resources

Restorative justice has never been fully funded in New York City. The educators, parents, and young people who have been building restorative school cultures have done so without adequate investment from state and city government, relying upon discrete funding opportunities, overstretched staff, and extensive unpaid labor of staff, students, and other community members. Meanwhile, upwards of \$425 million per year is directed to fund school policing and security infrastructure like metal detectors and NYPD-employed School Safety Agents, contributing to a culture of policing and surveillance of students that interferes with efforts to build restorative schools. We need a funding model that embodies the cultural transformation we are seeking in our schools. This means divesting from punishment and policing, and investing in prevention via social supports and community building, prevention, as well as restorative, healing-centered responses to harm.

- ▶ Divest from the Department of Education’s \$425M contract with the NYPD for school policing staffing (e.g., NYPD-employed ‘School Safety Agents’) as adopted for Fiscal Year 2022, as well as nontransparent funding directed to NYPD youth policing strategies (e.g., Youth Coordination Officers, among other initiatives), estimated to be upwards of tens of millions of

dollars; reallocate these funds towards the hiring and other resource needs described here.

- ▶ Allocate specific time and funding to support community-building and healing practices and programs in schools (e.g., expand advisory to all schools, discretionary funding for community events, adult- and peer-led mentorship programs, and discretionary funds to provide key support after incidents of harm).
- ▶ Allocate specific time and funding to support restorative justice as a community-building practice and preventative practice, not only as a response to harm. In addition to the increased staffing described above, key schedule and funding priorities include:
 - ▶ the expansion of advisory to all schools
 - ▶ system-wide, non-academic community building days
 - ▶ adult- and peer-led mentorship initiatives
 - ▶ discretionary budgets for school community-building events
 - ▶ adoption of culturally-sustaining curricula, with student input
- ▶ Provide discretionary funding to schools to support next steps resulting from restorative responses to harm, including accessing social and emotional support for those who have been harmed and those who have caused harm.
- ▶ Create citywide resource guides of neighborhood-based support services for youth and families that are not attached to systems of policing, surveillance, or family separation, to be used in support of response to harm circles.

Rethinking Restorative Justice Policy: Towards a Relationship-Centered Process

Restorative justice cannot only be enacted through top-down policy mandates alone; for authentic and meaningful change, it needs to be integrated into the practices that build and implement those policies as well. The Department of Education and city government must adopt restorative practices into how they develop policies. Decision making power across our education system needs to be reassessed and reimagined in order for restorative justice to be incorporated in a way that is authentic and prevents recreating past harm. It is critical that school community members—students, their families, educators and school staff—are key decision makers in the systems and institutions that shape their lives.

- ▶ Ensure that Department of Education restorative justice policies actively acknowledge in writing and engage with in practice:
 - ▶ community building as the foundation of responding to harm;
 - ▶ the indigenous roots of restorative justice; and,
 - ▶ the existence of structural and institutional harm, including within schools.

- ▶ Ensure that administrators, staff, and students have citywide opportunities to co-develop and reflect on the growth of restorative and healing-centered practices, including sharing innovative approaches across school communities.
- ▶ Create citywide youth leadership positions to inform restorative justice and other school policies, with decision making power and/or voting rights.
- ▶ Provide and fund introductory workshops about restorative justice available to all NYC parents via borough-wide or citywide workshops at least twice a year, promoted through children's schools and community networks.
- ▶ Provide funding and guidance to schools for processes to design community-specific approaches to school safety, rather than controlling it through citywide mandates.
- ▶ Expand participatory budgeting, so that schools and communities more broadly can seek funding for initiatives important to their communities (including community-building events and other restorative justice related initiatives).
- ▶ Establish data systems for tracking responses to harm and other school issues that better reflect restorative processes and a non-punitive approach.
- ▶ Fund and provide schools with guidance about how to design community-specific approaches to school safety, rather than controlling it through citywide mandates.