

# RESTORATIVE JUSTICE EDUCATION LEGISLATION: AN UPDATED RESEARCH REVIEW SUMMER 2026

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*This analysis is a policy resource to expand public access to information on trends in state education laws and to inform policymakers, community leaders, and practitioners about new legal developments affecting restorative justice practices and programs in K–12 schools. It presents analysis of 52 laws passed in 22 jurisdictions from 2020–2026. Although legislative approaches differ in scope and function, the research confirms continued legislative support for restorative justice practices in K–12 schools, even amid local and national efforts to return to zero tolerance and punitive discipline.<sup>1</sup>*

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## Introduction

Education is a foundational determinant of development that shapes outcomes across people’s lives, from early childhood through adulthood.<sup>2</sup> However, research shows the positive benefits of education are not distributed equally among children, in particular for students who experience removal from their learning environments through exclusionary disciplinary practices such as suspensions and expulsions.<sup>3</sup> Exclusionary discipline significantly reduces instructional time, weakens student–teacher relationships, and disrupts academic continuity<sup>4</sup>, and for children who are repeatedly excluded from the classroom they are more likely to fall behind academically, disengage from school, and experience lower rates of graduation.<sup>5</sup>

Given its broad influence across developmental, economic, health, and civic domains, education law and policy serve as critical levers for improving both childhood well-being and long-term community outcomes. Investments in equitable, high-quality education systems coupled with reforms that reduce reliance on exclusionary

Exclusionary discipline disproportionately affects students from marginalized racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, reinforcing inequities in educational attainment and long-term opportunity. For the last 50 years data have shown that Black students are punished more harshly

disciplinary practices are a core strategy for advancing equity and social development across generations.

The use of restorative justice—also defined as restorative approaches, restorative practices, and restorative justice education—has expanded significantly within a larger comprehensive school discipline reform movement that recognizes the immediate and long-term negative effects of exclusionary school discipline<sup>6</sup> and persistence of racialized disparities.<sup>7</sup>

than their white peers—experiencing suspension and expulsions at significantly higher rates across different regions, grade levels, and types of schools.<sup>8</sup> For example, Black preschoolers are 2.8 times more likely to have been suspended out of school and 2.4 times more likely to have been expelled.<sup>9</sup> Black elementary school students also experience increased punishment and exclusion and are 5.0 times more likely to have been suspended out of school.<sup>10</sup>

***Since the 1990s, restorative justice has been widely implemented in K-12 schools across the country as an educational equity framework to address the harms and disparities of exclusionary discipline practices.***

Restorative practices are designed to build a strong sense of community in schools, to teach interpersonal skills, to repair harm when conflict occurs, and to proactively meet students' needs—including those that result from trauma in or outside of school.<sup>11</sup> Studies of restorative practices have evidenced positive outcomes in school climate, school safety, school connectedness, peer relationships, social engagement and resilience, student misbehavior, and reduced suspensions and expulsions.<sup>12</sup> For example, a recent study found that, increasing access to restorative practices during the transition from 5th to 6th grade positively improved standardized test performance in both English language arts and mathematics."<sup>13</sup>

To support the adoption and implementation of restorative justice, K-12 education leaders and policymakers have designed local policies to guide the use of restorative practices across school setting, including in student codes of conduct and discipline policies.

Legislatures have also promoted and supported the development of restorative justice through state law.<sup>15</sup> A 2020 national systematic

review found 21 states and the District of Columbia had enacted 38 laws to support restorative justice education, including provisions related to implementation, training, funding, and data collection.<sup>16</sup>

In July 2025, the Illinois Board of Education issued guidances that reinforce the need to reduce reliance on exclusionary discipline techniques and continue to implement field-based best practices to provide safe and supportive environments for students and educators. In the same month, the California School Boards Association released field guides to advance and maintain equitable and supportive discipline, including key decisions that school boards can make.<sup>14</sup>

## Findings

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*Laws analyzed in this research brief were collected using Westlaw as a primary aggregator using an confirmed open coding process for K-12 based restorative justice<sup>17</sup> over the defined six-year period for 51 jurisdictions (e.g., 50 states and the District of Columbia). Results were consolidated and comparatively analyzed with prior studies.*

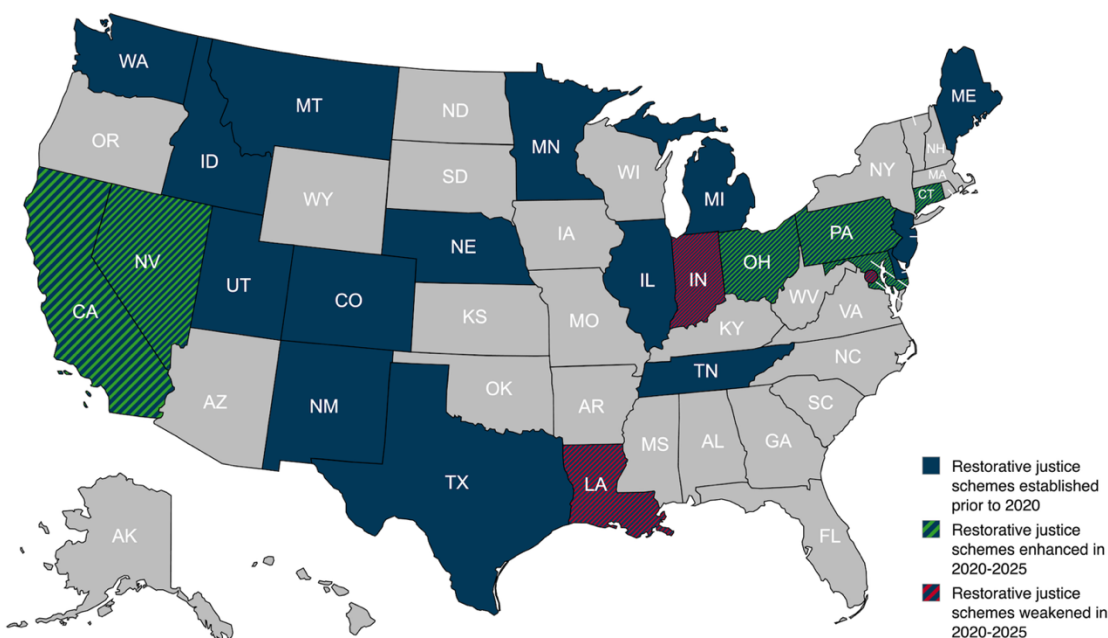
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As of April 2026, the national legislative scheme supporting restorative justice in K-12 schools includes 52 laws in 21 states and the District of Columbia. In the most recent six-year period (2020-2026) *eighteen laws* have been passed, amended or repealed in *nine* jurisdictions (Figure 1). The laws vary in form and effect and are represented in four primary categories (Table 1):

- \* Passage of new laws that promote the practice of restorative justice (9 laws, 6 jurisdictions)<sup>18</sup>
- \* Passage of amendments to existing restorative justice education laws that promote practice and implementation (6 laws, 4 jurisdictions)<sup>19</sup>

- \* Passage of amendments to existing restorative justice education laws that reduce practice and implementation (2 laws, 2 jurisdictions)<sup>20</sup>
- \* Recission of existing restorative justice education laws (2 laws, 2 jurisdictions)<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 1. Changes in Restorative Justice Education Laws 2020 to 2026**



**Table 1. Categories of Restorative Justice Education Laws**

Categories	Sub-categories	Jurisdiction
New +	Definitional, implementation infrastructure	California, Connecticut, Maryland, Nevada, Ohio, Washington D.C.
Amended +	Definitional, implementation infrastructure	California, Maryland, Nevada, Pennsylvania
Amended -	Removal of reference to “restorative practices” (Louisiana) and “restorative justice” (Indiana)	Indiana, Louisiana

Recission	Removal of all funding for professional development on restorative justice in K-12 schools	Indiana, Washington D.C.
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*The implementation infrastructure subcategory in Table 1 includes laws that provide funding for restorative justice programs and professional development,<sup>22</sup> promote professional development,<sup>23</sup> establish accountability measures,<sup>24</sup> and develop restorative justice frameworks.<sup>25</sup>*

## Key Takeaways

- \* States legislatures continue to expand support for restorative justice as an evidence-based educational practice.<sup>26</sup>
- \* New restorative justice education laws primarily focus on (1) definitions and (2) infrastructure development (e.g., training, accountability, and guidance).
- \* Two new states enacted laws
  - Connecticut mandates professional development in restorative justice and culturally responsive pedagogy and practice for school personnel.<sup>27</sup>
  - Ohio establishes accountability measures to track restorative practices “in response to disruptive behaviors” and develop “evidence-based and evidence-informed strategies, practices, and content for use of restorative practices in K-12.”<sup>28</sup>
- \* Law limiting restorative justice are limited in scope, primarily involving reduced funding, professional development, or removal of terminology from education codes
  - No laws eliminate of existing K–12 restorative justice programs

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<sup>1</sup> Thalia González & Will Martel, *Retrenchment, Segregation, and Public Education: A Five-Year Analysis of State Exclusionary School Discipline Legislation*, 28 N.Y.U. J. LEGIS. & PUB. POL'Y 1 (2026).

<sup>2</sup> Paula Braveman & Laura Gottlieb, *The Social Determinants of Health: It's Time to Consider the Causes of the Causes*, 129 PUB. HEALTH REP. 19, 19–31 (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Wade C. Jacobson, et al., *Punishment and Inequality at an Early Age: Exclusionary Discipline in Elementary School*, 97 Soc. Forces 973 (2019); Michael Niño et al., *The Long Arm of School Punishment: The Role of School Suspension on Self-Rated Health from Adolescence to Midlife*, 10 SOCIUS 1 (2024); Alexia Angton et al., *The Long-Term Consequences of School Suspension and Expulsion on Depressive Symptoms*, 61 ADVANCES LIFE COURSE RSCH. 100631 (2024).

<sup>4</sup> DANIEL J. LOSEN & PAUL MARTINEZ, LOST OPPORTUNITIES: HOW DISPARATE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE CONTINUES TO DRIVE DIFFERENCES IN THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN, (2020),

[https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/508/download?inline&file=CRDC\\_School\\_Discipline\\_REPO\\_RT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/508/download?inline&file=CRDC_School_Discipline_REPO_RT.pdf); CHRISTINA LICALI, ET AL., AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF SUSPENSION AND SUSPENSION SEVERITY ON BEHAVIORAL AND ACADEMIC SOURCES, (2021), <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/NYC-Suspension-Effects-Behavioral-Academic-Outcomes-August-2021.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Alison L. Noltemeyer, et al., *Relationship Between School Suspension and Student Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis*, 85 REV. EDUC. RES. 282 (2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Spotlight Research Brief: Exclusionary School Discipline and Student Health and Wellbeing*, UC L. SAN FRANCISCO CTR. RACE AND ECON. JUST., (June 2025), <https://www.uclawsf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ESD-and-Health-Research-Brief.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> *K-12 Education: Nationally, Black Girls Receive More Frequent and More Severe Discipline in School Than Other Girls*, U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., (Sep. 2024),

<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106787>; Richard O. Welsh, Blaise B. Joseph & Luis A. Rodriguez, *The State of School Discipline: Examining the Variation in Suspensions Across the United States*, J. EDUC. STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK 1 (2026); Sean Darling-Hammond & Eric Ho, *No Matter How You Slice It, Black Students Are Punished More: The Persistence and Pervasiveness of Discipline Disparities*, 10 AM. EDUC. RSCH. ASS'N OPEN (2024); Sara Novak, *Half of the 250 Kids Expelled from Preschool Each Day are Black Boys*, SCI. AM., (Jan. 2023) [https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/half-of-the-250-kids-expelled-from-preschool-each-day-are-black-](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/half-of-the-250-kids-expelled-from-preschool-each-day-are-black-boys/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202017%20survey%2C%20250%20children,circle%20time%20*%20Running%20from%20the%20classroom.)

[boys/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202017%20survey%2C%20250%20children,circle%20time%20\\*%20Running%20from%20the%20classroom.](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/half-of-the-250-kids-expelled-from-preschool-each-day-are-black-boys/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202017%20survey%2C%20250%20children,circle%20time%20*%20Running%20from%20the%20classroom.)

<sup>8</sup> Richard O. Welsh, *Up the Down Escalator? Examining a Decade of School Discipline Reforms*, 150 CHILD. YOUTH SERV. REV. 106962 (2023); Sean Darling-Hammond & Eric Ho, *No Matter How You Slice It, Black Students Are Punished More: The Persistence and Pervasiveness of Discipline Disparities*, 10 AM. EDUC. RSCH. ASS'N OPEN 1 (2024); Jennifer Candipan & Chantal A. Hailey, *School Discipline Disparities Increase When Neighborhood Black Population Changes*, SCI. ADVANCE (Feb. 2026),

[https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.ady4239#:~:text=In%20the%20long%20term%2C%20suspensions,future%20tax%20revenue%20\(21\).](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.ady4239#:~:text=In%20the%20long%20term%2C%20suspensions,future%20tax%20revenue%20(21).)

<sup>9</sup> Sean Darling-Hammond & Eric Ho, *No Matter How You Slice It, Black Students Are Punished More: The Persistence and Pervasiveness of Discipline Disparities*, 10 AM. EDUC. RSCH. ASS'N OPEN 1 (2024).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Improving Student Outcomes Through Restorative Practices*, LEARNING POL'Y INST., (Oct. 2023), <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/restorative-practices-factsheet>.

<sup>12</sup> Sean Darling-Hammond, *Fostering Belonging, Transforming Schools: The Impact of Restorative Practices*, LEARNING POL'Y INST., (May 2023), [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4046/download?inline&file=Restorative\\_Practices\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4046/download?inline&file=Restorative_Practices_REPORT.pdf); Thalia González, Heather Sattler & Annalise J. Buth, *New Directions in a Whole-School Restorative Justice Implementation*, 36 CONFLICT RESOL. Q. 207 (2019); Thalia González & Rebecca Epstein, *Critical Race Feminism, Health, and Restorative Practices in Schools: Centering the Experiences of Black and Latina Girls*, 29 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 409 (2022); *Restorative Practices*, UNIV. OF CHICAGO EDUC. LAB, (2026), <https://educationlab.uchicago.edu/projects/restorative-practices/>.

<sup>13</sup> Darling-Hammond, *supra* note 12, at vi.

<sup>14</sup> ILL. STATE BD. OF EDUC., SB 1400 SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GUIDANCE (2025), <https://www.isbe.net/discipline>; CAL. SCH. BDS. ASS'N, PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARD ADVANCING EQUITABLE AND SUPPORTIVE DISCIPLINE: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL BOARDS (2025).

<sup>15</sup> Thalia González et al., *Restorative Justice, School Reopenings, and Educational Equity: A Contemporary Mapping and Analysis of State Law*, 55 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. ONLINE 43 (2021); Jen K. Molloy et al., *Restorative Justice in Education: A Content Analysis of US State Legislation From 2010 to 2020*, 38 EDUC. POL'Y 1312 (2024).

<sup>16</sup> School-Based Restorative Justice Legislative Trends, GEO. L. CTR. POVERTY AND INEQ., (2020), <https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/School-Based-RJ-Legislative-Trends-1-1-1.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Search terms used were “restorative justice education,” “restorative approaches education,” “restorative justice schools,” and “restorative education.”

<sup>18</sup> CAL. EDUC. CODE § 41480 (West 2026); CAL. EDUC. CODE § 46120 (West 2026); CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-148d; D.C. CODE ANN. § 38-236.07 (West 2026) (repealed 2024); MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-306.1 (West 2026); MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 6-121 (West 2026); MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-453 (West 2026); NEV. REV. STAT. § 388.1333 (2026); OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 3333.041 (West 2026).

<sup>19</sup> CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48900.5(c) (West 2026) (encourages restorative justice approaches between perpetrator and “victim” for pupils suspended due to “an incident of racist bullying, harassment, or intimidation” and encourages agencies “to require perpetrators to engage in culturally sensitive programs that promote racial justice and equity and combat racism and ignorance.”); CAL. EDUC. CODE § 49600(c)(5) (West 2026) (amends to additionally promote and urge within restorative justice approaches to contemplate and screen for mental and behavioral health considerations, to encourage use of variety of intervention strategies “to meet individual, group and school community needs before, during, and after crisis response,” and to provide direct (“individual counseling, group counseling, risk assessment, crisis response, and instructional services, including, but not limited to, mental health, behavioral, academic, and postsecondary educational services”) and indirect services (“positive school climate strategies, teacher and parent consultations, and referrals to public and private community services.”); MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-306 (West 2026) (amended 2025) (amends definition of restorative practices to include “communally and culturally responsive”); NEV. REV. STAT. § 392.472 (2026) (amended 2023) (requires progressive discipline plan for students removed from classroom and this progressive discipline is required to be based on restorative justice practices); 24 PA. STAT. ANN. § 13-1302-A (West 2026) (adds restorative justice practices to disciplinary practices; requires trauma-informed practices when using restorative justice); 24 PA. STAT. ANN. § 13-1306-B (West 2026) (additional funding).

<sup>20</sup> IND. CODE § 20-28-3-3.5 (2026) (amended 2025); LA. STAT. ANN. § 17:252 (2026) (amended 2025).

<sup>21</sup> D.C. CODE ANN. § 38-236.07 (West 2026) (repealed 2024); IND. CODE § 5-2-10.1-2 (2026) (repealed 2023).

<sup>22</sup> CAL. EDUC. CODE § 41480 (West 2026); 24 PA. STAT. ANN. § 13-1306-B (West 2026).

<sup>23</sup> CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-148d (2026).

<sup>24</sup> CAL. EDUC. CODE § 41480 (West 2026); OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 3333.041 (West 2026); MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-453 (West 2026).

<sup>25</sup> 24 PA. STAT. ANN. § 13-1302-A (West 2026); MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-453 (West 2026); NEV. REV. STAT. § 392.472 (2026).

<sup>26</sup> This is despite local and national trends to promote punitive and exclusionary discipline practices. González & Martel, *supra* note 1; Thalia González, Quinn Chappelle & Will Martel, *Trend Analysis: State Legislation Expanding the Use of Exclusionary School Discipline (ESD)*, Center on Racial and Economic Justice, University of California College of the Law, San Francisco (2025).

<sup>27</sup> CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-148d (2026).

<sup>28</sup> OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 3333.041 (West 2026).