

## A Program That WORKS

*By Dr. James Arnold*

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School Boards and Educational Leaders have struggled for many years with school disciplinary issues; more specifically the negative impact of disciplinary issues on student learning for the offender and the offended (Balfanz, R, byrnes, v., and Fox, J 2018). Traditionally, school discipline codes have been based on conformity and modeled on the criminal justice system. Rules (laws) are established, penalties for infractions are set, incidents investigated, students are charged and penalties are imposed. Order has been kept by punishing those that do not or will not conform, rewarding those that do, and, if the infractions continue, either pushing out or assigning the habitual offenders to an alternative setting. Disciplinary consequences in schools and classes are very often as much about allowing conforming students the opportunity to learn without disruption as about providing a consequence for the habitually disruptive student, and teachers and administrators are seemingly more concerned with following procedures than providing an educational opportunity for the offenders (Jones, E.P., 2018). Schools, in other words, rarely have the resources and/or training to deal effectively with the countless behavioral issues that students bring from their homes and communities, and the disciplinary consequences are often disproportionately administered to minority students (Rumberger, R. W.; Losen, D. J. 2016). Very few educators, if any, would dare to argue that alternative school settings in the overwhelming majority of school systems were equal to regular schools academically. The UCLA Civil Rights Project (<https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/>) noted that schools with high suspension rates are less safe, less equitable and have lower academic performance outcomes than schools with lower suspension rates (Steinberg, M., Allensworth, E., Johnson, D. 2013).

Zero tolerance policies for students, once seen as an answer to disruptive behavior in schools, have been found to be counterproductive and fail to prevent recidivism ([www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2006/08/zero-tolerance](http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2006/08/zero-tolerance)). These policies not only fail to make schools safer or smarter, the unintended consequences are increased incidents of bad behavior, higher dropout rates and the punishments and consequences are disproportionately applied to students of color.

Restorative justice for schools is a set of principles and practices that looks at student misbehavior and disruption with the goal of not only repairing the harm done and restoring the relationships of those involved but ultimately teaching the common values of respect, inclusion, responsibility, empathy, honesty, openness and accountability (Zehr, 2003) without resorting to suspensions, expulsions and alternative school assignments. Instead of focusing on the crime and punishment of offenders, restorative justice asks who has been hurt, what are their needs and who has the obligation of addressing those needs and resolving the harm done. School -

based restorative justice includes prevention, intervention and re-integration aspects. Since a school is an easily defined community of teachers, staff, students and their families, restorative practices can help schools create and maintain a positive school culture and climate ([edutopia.org/stw/glenview-case-study](http://edutopia.org/stw/glenview-case-study)).

The WORKS (Working On Refocusing, Redirecting, Realigning Kids Successfully) program is a restorative justice based program currently in use in several public schools and systems in Georgia. The stated purposes of the program are to improve the relationship between school and home through parental involvement, implement strategies to improve teacher - student relationships and to implement alternatives to suspension and strategies to improve student behavior and decrease the amount of instructional time lost. The programs' goals are to improve targeted students' attendance, increase academic performance, improve parental engagement and provide strategies for parents and teachers to more effectively guide student success than in traditional disciplinary methods.

John Hattie (Hattie, 2009) developed a method of ranking various influences related to learning and achievement according to their effect size. Effect sizes greater than .4 have an above average impact on student achievement. Home Factors, for example, including social class, help with homework, the extent to which the learner's education is thought to be important, maternal involvement and play materials, were measured at .52 effect size. Parental involvement and parent aspirations (.51 effect size), were also an important influence on student academic achievement. Teacher students relationships (.72 effect size) were emphasized as an important influence on student learning by students, parents, and Principals but not by Teachers.

Another important influence on student learning (.84 effect size) was the number of hours the student was actively taught per day. Frequent removal of the student through suspension, In-School suspension or other factors may have a negative influence on student achievement. Comprehensive school reform efforts have consistently documented the academic effectiveness of programs designed to increase the time students spend engaged in learning (Borman, Hewes, Overman and Brown 2003) (Zurawsky, 2004). Additionally, in classrooms where management appears to be ineffective and disciplinary power struggles between students and the Teachers are apparent instructional time is substantially reduced (Vavrus and Cole, 2002).

George Washington Carver High School is a majority -minority high school in the Muscogee County School District in Columbus GA. The school is a STEM school and has about 1136 students and 92 faculty and staff. The graduation rate at the school has increased from 76.4% in 2015 to 86.31% in 2018. About 91% of Carver's students are minority students.

The Second Chance WORKS program has been partnered with George Washington Carver High School in the Muscogee County School District in Columbus GA for the past two academic years. The program, instituted first as a pilot program and continued in 2018 upon approval for funding, paired a certified restorative justice trainer/consultant with the needs of the school through interviews with Administrators, Teachers and an LEA Administrator and

implemented a comprehensive program of 36 modules based on leadership, social emotional learning and academic achievement skills in place of ISS or OSS for disciplinary and/or attendance issues. Each module contains a statement of purpose, a video to explain the purpose of the lesson, an engaging scenario that allows the student to role play and see a situation from multiple perspectives and an opportunity for reflection about what has been learned. Students are selected for participation by a team composed of the WORKS consultant, school administrators, LEA administrators and the ISS Coordinator. Students are recommended for program participation based on a combination of disciplinary and attendance factors. Rather than serve time in In School Suspension or Out of School Suspension the students and parents agree to participate in the WORKS program modules. Parent participation in Saturday programs/modules are a requirement for student enrollment in the WORKS program. In January 2017 and again in January 2018 forty (40) GWCHS students were selected for the WORKS program and assigned times to begin working with the WORKS consultant.

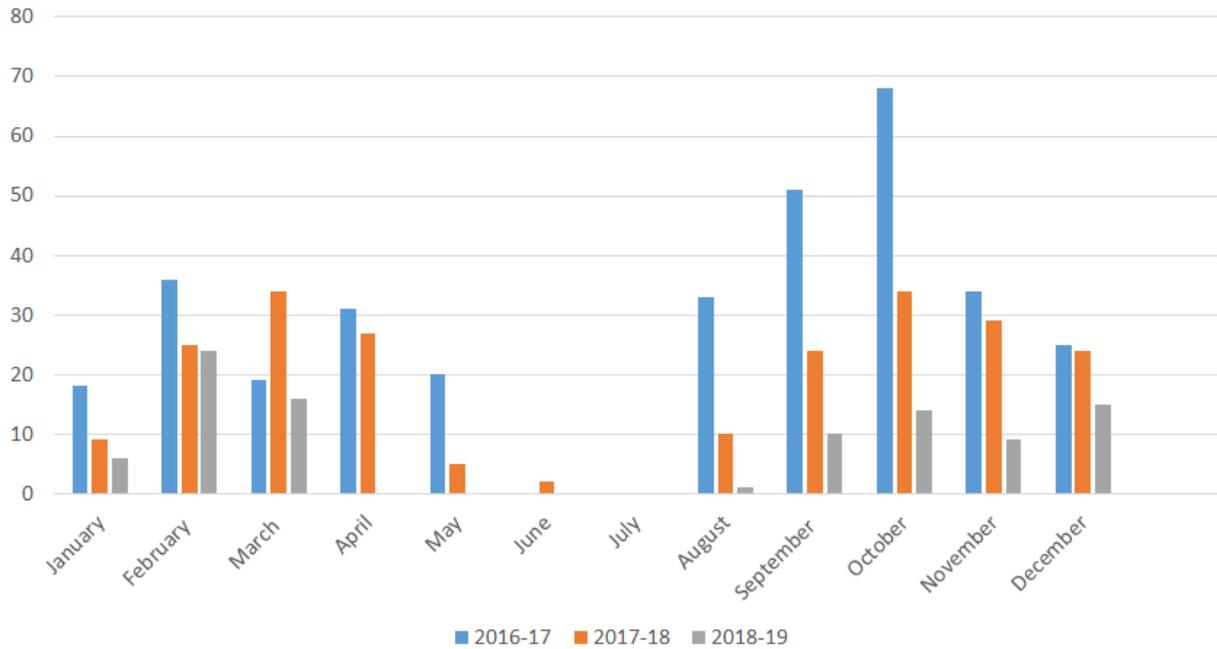
The WORKS Consultant supervises the students during the school day as they work individually on the modules, and students work at their own pace. WORKS sessions, each led by a certified Restorative Justice trainer, are held each school week Tuesdays and Thursdays. Friday and Saturday sessions for students assigned out of school suspensions are held every other week, and the Saturday sessions are those that parents of student offenders are required to attend. Results, as indicated in the charts below, show comparisons of discipline rates for GWCHS for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years. Of the 40 students originally assigned to the WORKS program in January 2018, two students were withdrawn from school by their parents rather than participate. Of the 38 remaining students, parents of 8 individual students were required to attend Saturday sessions with their children as an alternative to OSS. All 8 did so, and completed the program. The 38 students from all four grade levels (9, 10, 11 and 12) had compiled a total of 116 disciplinary referrals for the current school year in the five months prior to their January assignment to the WORKS program. During and after their participation, there were 26 disciplinary referrals issued to participating students. Students that recognize their own lack of achievement are now beginning to volunteer for participation in the program in addition to those assigned for disciplinary reasons.

Reduced suspension rates for ISS and OSS students mean more days in class for those students and increased learning time. It also means teachers no longer provide make up or make work lessons for students in ISS or OSS. The chart below indicates that the WORKS program, in conjunction with PBIS training, has significantly decreased the average number of discipline referrals per day per month in the course of one school year.

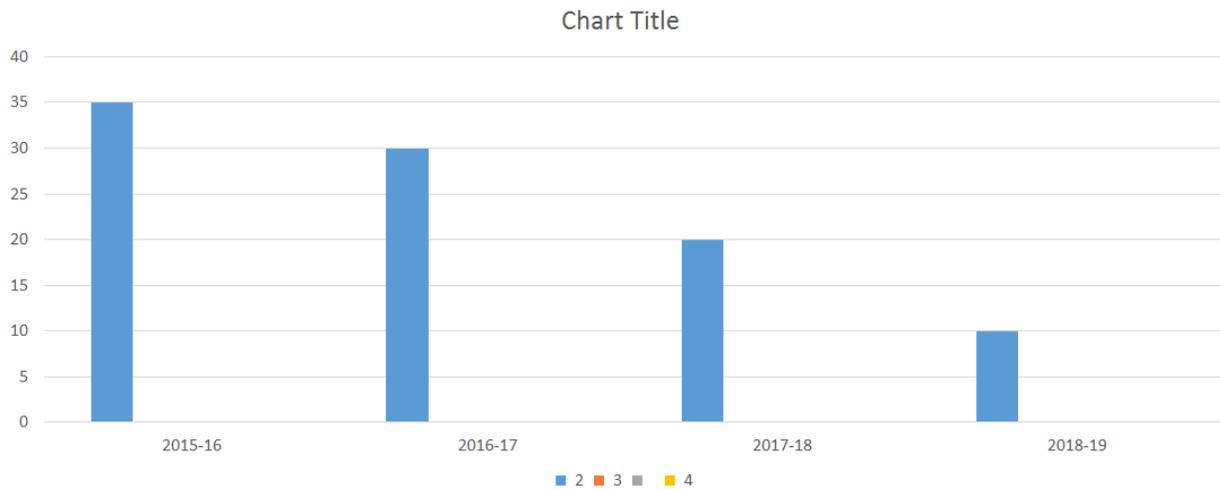
<b>G.W. Carver H.S. – Discipline Data Oct 2016- March 17 &amp; Oct 2017- March 18</b>						
	<b>Oct 2016- March 17 (DAYS)</b>	<b>Oct 2017- March 18 (DAYS)</b>	<b>Oct 2016- March 17 (EVENTS)</b>	<b>Oct 2017- March 18 (EVENTS)</b>	<b>Oct 2016- March 17 (Student Contributing)</b>	<b>Oct 2017- March 18 (Student Contributing)</b>
In-School Suspension	38	14	24	6	23	5
Out-of-School Suspension	718	537	171	152	143	121
Expulsion	0	0	0	0	0	0

<b>G.W. Carver H.S. – Discipline Data Jan 2017- March 17 &amp; Jan 2018- March 18</b>						
	<b>Jan 2017- March 17 (DAYS)</b>	<b>Jan 2018- March 18 (DAYS)</b>	<b>Jan 2017- March 17 (EVENTS)</b>	<b>Jan 2018- March 18 (EVENTS)</b>	<b>Jan 2017- March 17 (Student Contributing)</b>	<b>Jan 2018- March 18 (Student Contributing)</b>
In-School Suspension	13	4	6	2	6	2
Out-of-School Suspension	300	215	66	57	62	52
Expulsion	0	0	0	0	0	0

Average Discipline Referrals Per Day Per Month  
2016-17 2017-18 2018-19 (Year to Date)  
George Washington Carver HS



Discipline data is complete for 2016-17 and 2017-18, but do not include figures for April, May, June and July for 2018-19.



The number of referrals per 100 students per school year indicate a dramatic reduction in the two years of the WORKS program.

The data indicates the WORKS program, implemented in conjunction with a school -wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support program, reduces significantly not only the number of disciplinary incidents during the observed segments of the respective school years, but the combination of restorative justice methods and required parental involvement can positively impact the overall school culture and student and parental behaviors. The data also indicates the restorative justice model may provide an efficacious solution to many disciplinary issues in schools as opposed to simply a consequence. As Assistant Principal Lisa Norris noted, “the works program at GW Carver High School has served to reduce the number of discipline referrals, the number of ISS assignments and the days of school missed for OSS assignments. Our students in the program learn that correction or direction by another student, a teacher or an administrator is not meant as a personal attack, and that there are other, more appropriate ways to respond than confrontation. Fewer disciplinary issues and consequences also mean our school climate and academic achievement have improved significantly.”

More information on the WORKS program may be found at <https://www.chancesforkids.org/>

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