



Physical assaults on school staff have increased dramatically; Restorative Practices and Behavior Analysis provide ways to improve school climate and culture.

Behavioral Management: Implementing Best Practices to Improve School Climate and Culture

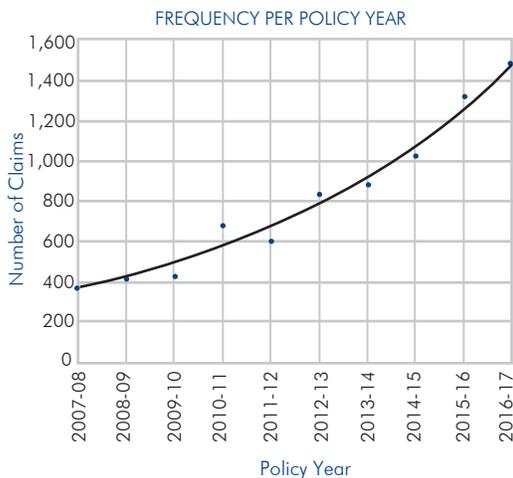


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Physical assaults against school staff have increased exponentially in the past decade.

Figure 1.



The number of physical assault claims experienced by teachers and paraprofessionals has increased exponentially over the past ten years (**Figure 1**). In addition to the Workers' Compensation claim costs and physical pain that these events cause, staff can suffer from long term emotional stress and trauma, which may affect their personal and professional lives.

Through further analysis into the causes of these injuries, CIRMA identified a trend in behavioral issues in those students **who were not** identified by either an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 Plan, or other intensive management program. CIRMA brought this analysis to its School District Advisory Committee work group, whose members include Nancy Pugliese, Connecticut Department of Education; Dr. Jo Ann Freiberg, Connecticut Department of Education; Dr. Patricia Ciccone, Superintendent of School, Westbrook; Michele DiMauro, Middletown Public Schools, and the Middletown Public School's Board Certified Behavior Analyst team, headed by Ms. DiMauro. The group identified the following elements that, when addressed through additional training and added support staff, could improve school culture and subsequently reduce the number of physical assault claims:

- Classroom management
- Crisis intervention
- Trauma management
- De-escalation techniques
- Incident documentation

This CIRMA white paper outlines the best practices for developing and implementing a behavioral management program that is capable of assessing school climate, improving staff and student culture, identifying staff training needs, and using the restorative practices model to enhance classroom management.

Background

"Physical Assault," a subcategory of "Struck By," is a Workers' Compensation Insurance Organization (WCIO) claim code that is applied to cases in which the physical injury was produced by an impact created by another person, regardless of intent to harm.¹ Examples include:

- Being struck while breaking up a fight.
- Getting bit.
- Getting kicked.
- Being punched/scratched.

Physical Assault claims among teachers and paraprofessionals have accounted for:

- \$7.8 million in losses in the ten year period of 2007-08 to 2016-17, including an average of over \$1 million in total severity per year over the last five years.
- One claim per day in Policy Year 2007/2008 has risen to four claims per day in Policy Year 2016/2017 (**Figure 2**).

“Physical assault have a significant impact on education workers’ job satisfaction and health-related quality of life”

Physical Assaults Among Education Workers Study, National Institutes of Health, 2014

Figure 2.

Policy Year	Claims Reported	Days During Period	Claims Reported Per Day
2007/2008	368	366	1.01
2008/2009	416	365	1.14
2009/2010	439	365	1.20
2010/2011	679	365	1.86
2011/2012	601	366	1.64
2012/2013	833	365	2.28
2013/2014	882	365	2.42
2014/2015	1,025	365	2.81
2015/2016	1,321	366	3.61
2016/2017	1,469	365	4.02

CIRMA worked closely with Nancy Pugliese and the Connecticut State Department of Education to delve deeper into the incident descriptions of Physical Assault claims. Our analysis identified that one of the major causes of the increase in severity is contact from students who are **not** in any behavioral management program.

Generally, IEPs, 504 Plans and other intensive management programs are successful because they help provide necessary information to educators on how to effectively communicate with and plan lessons for those students with behavioral or other needs. However, educators indicate that there is not a similar method of documentation for students who are not identified as needing some form of behavioral management program. Often times, this lack of documentation makes it difficult for faculty to apply appropriate risk mitigation techniques to protect themselves and their students from physical and emotional harm caused by the actions of a few students. Furthermore, it can propagate a bias amongst educators that there are “problem-students” who will continue to act out or are unwilling to change their behavior.

School districts throughout the state of Connecticut are investing in new and innovative methods that promote positive school climate to fill the gaps in documentation methods that existed in their previous systems, these methods include:

- The Restorative Practices method
- Board Certified Behavior Analysts

The Connecticut State Department of Education has recognized the Restorative

¹www.wcio.org/Document%20Library/InjuryDescriptionTablePage.aspx

Restorative practices is an emerging social science that studies how to strengthen relationships and social connections.

“Restorative Practices build community and can help set things right when the integrity of the community is challenged by harmful behaviors.

Amos Clifford, Center for Restorative Process

Practices method as the best practice for establishing and maintaining a safer culture within the classroom, school, and even the district. This method is intended to lead to a more motivated and well-behaved student body.

There have also been major advancements in the scientific study of the principles of learning and behavior, called Behavior Analysis. School systems are employing more Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), individuals with a graduate-level certification in Behavior Analysis, to observe classroom and school culture in order to develop, implement, and train staff on programs aimed at engaging students and rewarding good behavior. It should be considered a best practice to utilize both the Restorative Practices method and the expertise of BCBAs in conjunction with each other to foster a safe environment where students feel like they can learn and have a voice. Like all new and valuable techniques, staff should be trained regularly on how to effectively employ these tactics.

New Approaches

The Restorative Practices Methods

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), whose campus is located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is an international graduate school with affiliates in the United States, Canada, Latin America, Europe, and Australia. IIRP developed a program called *Restorative Practices*, which is intended to build healthy communities, increase social capital, reduce the impact of crime, decrease antisocial behavior, repair harm and restore relationships. This program emphasizes the importance of connecting to students on an emotional level and the impacts that has on the students' academic and behavioral development.²

The fundamental hypothesis of Restorative Practices is that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. The idea is to promote an environment where students are able to learn from and teach each other in a constructive way. Thus, educators are encouraged to apply the concept of “circles” into various moments throughout the day. Restorative Circles are “a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community, or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems. Circles give people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum and equality.”³ A Restorative Circle can be as simple as arranging chairs in a circle to ensure that all members of the classroom are positioned on an equal basis. Within the circle, the circle facilitator (the teacher, paraprofessional, etc.) poses a question or topic for the members of the circle to consider. Each member of the circle, including the circle facilitator, then has a chance to talk without interruption, building trust and a sense of acceptance among classmates and faculty. Restorative Circles are intended to

²www.iirp.edu

³www.iirp.edu/what-we-do/what-is-restorative-practices/defining-restorative/21-5-2-circles

The U.S. Federal Government issued new guidelines recommending that schools revise their discipline policies to move away from zero tolerance policies.

“build a particular sense of community in which every member – students, teacher, parent volunteers, and aides – feel that they are *seen, heard, and respected.*”⁴

The method of Restorative Practices has set out to fill the voids created by the punitive system that has been adopted by both the judicial and many educational systems. For instance, CGS 10-233d establishes criteria of student’s actions that require expulsion hearings and gives the local or regional board of education the right to expel students.⁵ However, proponents of the Restorative Practices method argue that expulsion does not teach the student what he or she did wrong or allow him or her to correct those actions and learn from past mistakes, resulting in chronic misbehavior and future incidents. Expulsion also does not allow the victim of such actions to experience closure, which may affect his or her emotional and behavioral development moving forward. Therefore, a more collaborative process involving school administrators, the parties involved, and in many cases the families of the parties involved may be undertaken that addresses what happened, why it happened, who was harmed in the process, and what needs to be done to make things right. Faculty is even given a series of questions that they are able to utilize in order to assist in the investigative process and ensure that all parties have their voices heard.

Restorative Questions

To Respond to Challenging Behavior

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- What has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

Restorative Questions

To Help Those Harmed by Others Actions

- What did you think when you realized what had happened?
- What impact has this incident had on you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

These questions are better asked to each student separately at the beginning of the investigative process; however, the conflict resolution aspect may occur with both parties in one room. Ideally, Restorative Circles should be used to ensure that each individual affected has a chance to voice his or her opinions: all voices should get a chance to be heard.

⁴Clifford, Amos. “Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles.” Center for Restorative Process.

⁵www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-233

Behavior Analysis is the scientific study of principles of learning and behavior.

Recognizing the benefits of the Restorative Practices method, the Connecticut State Department of Education offers seminars throughout the state at various locations. These training courses are taught by Dr. Jo Ann Freiberg, Education Consultant in the School Climate, Bullying and Character Education division of the Turnaround Office, and Dr. Patricia Ciccone, Superintendent of the Westbrook Public Schools. (See resources section at the end of this paper.)

Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs)

Board Certified Behavior Analysts are individuals with a graduate-level certification in Behavior Analysis, which is the scientific study of the principles of learning and behavior. BCBAs have the ability to:

- Conduct behavioral assessments.
- Analyze data that could identify skill deficits or problem behavior.
- Write and revise treatments plans.
- Train and implement such plans.⁶

It has been a long standing misconception that the BCBAs' sole purpose is to assist in the education of students on the Autism Spectrum. The science of Behavior Analysis has the ability to address the behavior of every student within the school district. BCBAs can be used on a micro scale, by working directly with an individual student or teacher, or on a more macro basis, through the design of a classroom system or school- or district-wide plan.

The ideal process for implementing a successful Behavioral Management program with the assistance of Board Certified Behavior Analysts consists of five steps. To start, each school must give the BCBA an opportunity to observe the teachers within the school during their normal operations. This is not to be done in a manner in which any one administrator or educator passes judgement on another faculty member, but rather to allow a qualified Behavior Analyst time to see what is currently being done in order to identify where there is room to grow and where successful educational techniques can be accentuated. Once this has been done, the BCBAs should be allowed to then design and implement a school-wide program that engages students intellectually as well as emotionally. The success of this step relies heavily on the ability of the administration and BCBA staff to appropriately communicate their expectations to faculty members. Preferably, the best case scenario would occur when the teacher is able to work with the BCBA to develop a relationship and support system.

In similar fashion, the third step involves implementing classroom and school-wide systems that reward good behavior. A common assessment from educators is that many students act out for attention.⁷ When a child misbehaves in school, it creates a problem that is two-fold. First, the instructor is forced to pay more attention to that child, who has succeeded in gaining the attention, albeit negative, of the instructor. The child then knows that his or her actions were effective and is prone to repeating such actions, possibly leading to chronic misbehavior. Second, the instructor must reduce the time and attention spent on those students who have not misbehaved. This can impede the psychological development of the other students and cause them to suffer academically. Therefore, by implementing a system that rewards the good behaviors of students, impulse to act out is reduced.

⁶www.bacb.com/about-behavior-analysis/

The fourth step of the process involves the regular training of teachers. The training should not only recommunicate goals and responsibilities, but also teach tactics related to behavior, trauma, classroom management, how to engage students, how to assign and tailor work to students at different educational or behavioral phases, interaction with students, de-escalation, etc. Many BCBA's have the ability to conduct these trainings themselves, as they specialize in one or more of the areas listed above. Finally, the school district must develop some sort of community outreach program aimed at engaging parents. Not only do parents deserve to know what is going on with their children at school, they are often very passionate about ensuring the school is doing what is best for the child. Community outreach must be an "all hands on deck" approach to communicate how each child benefits from the new program, as well as listen to any objections or questions that parents may have.

Another best practice that the BCBA's can assist the school district with is record keeping. IEPs, 504 Plans, and other intensive management programs provide the school with individualized documentation records to help educators form strategies to effectively communicate with and plan lessons for the students on these plans. Many BCBA's recommend that similar records should be filled out for all students every time an incident related to behavior arises. Such documentation should include incident descriptions, investigative reporting, and mediation. By doing this, faculty can better identify certain triggers and implement preventative measures.

Board Certified Behavior Analysts should also be contributing members of the school's "crisis intervention team." When a serious traumatic event arises involving one or more students, it is important to get a group of qualified professionals together, called a "crisis intervention team," that can investigate and intervene appropriately. The team should consist of BCBA's, social workers, school psychiatrists, and administrators. Their role is to help the teacher through an event by being a support system and the team should be both hands-on and observational. By doing this, the school is building a better sense of community amongst faculty, who now feel like they do not have to go through any problem alone.

Holistic Risk Management Approach

Promoting a positive school climate should be the responsibility of the entire faculty. As Halford E. Luccock, a 20th century Yale University professor and minister said, "You can't whistle a symphony; it takes an orchestra to play it." CIRMA considers it a best practice for schools to use both the Restorative Practices method and the expertise of BCBA's in conjunction with each other as tools to foster a safe environment where students feel like they can learn and have a voice. The process steps are:

1. **Identify** – Use restorative circles and other aspects of the Restorative Practices method, or another behavioral management technique, to generate student participation and emotional connectedness.
2. **Analyze** – Work as a team (teachers, paraprofessionals, BCBA's, principal, etc.) to communicate the positive and negative interactions throughout the school day.
3. **Evaluate** – Develop a system that engages students academically and emotionally.
4. **Select and Implement** – Choose a program that accentuates good behavior and limits disruptions.

⁷www.educationgy.org/web/index.php/teachers/tips-for-teaching/item/1675-what-are-the-causes-of-misbehavior-in-the-classroom

For more information about this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant.

5. **Monitor and Review** – Constantly examine what is working and not working, and then address areas for improvement.

By applying these best practices, the district can assure it is addressing school climate from a holistic risk management approach. Following Luccock’s analogy, the BCBA’s and administrators should be the orchestra’s conductor, the rest of the staff are the musicians, and the Restorative Practices method should be an instrument that will help create a beautiful harmony between academics and behavioral management.

Resources

Behavior Analyst Certification Board. www.bacb.com

Clifford, Amos. “Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles.” *Center for Restorative Process*.

Dr. Jo Ann Freiberg and School Climate Training. (Contact and additional information can be found on the Connecticut State Department of Education’s website. www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2700&Q=322402)

International Institute for Restorative Practices. www.iirp.edu

“Teacher Interventions: Managing liability before, during, and after an altercation,” CIRMA, whitepaper 2017.

Additional training programs for educators can be found at CIRMA’s E-Learning Center, cirma.ccm-ct.org/Plugs/workshops-Elearning-center.aspx

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