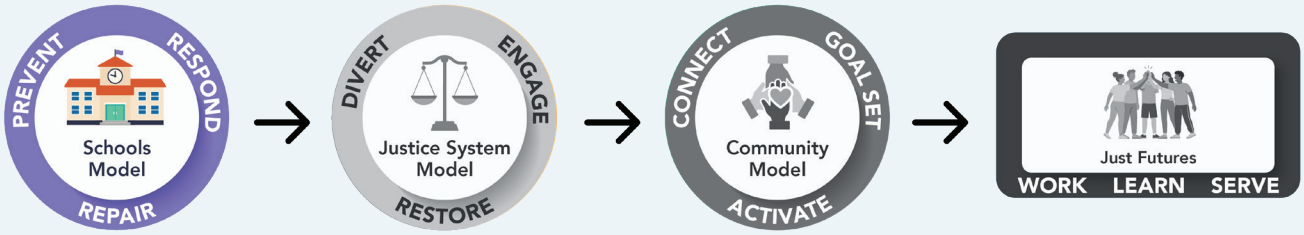
Prevent, Respond, Repair: A Model for Schools



The Schools Model: Prevent, Respond, Repair aims to strengthen belonging and create school environments in which harmful and exclusionary behavior is less likely to occur. Prevention focuses on equipping school leaders, teachers, staff, and students with the skills to build inclusive environments and intervene before harm occurs. When conflict or harmful behavior does occur, clear, effective responses help ensure students understand how harm will be addressed and that adults have the tools to respond consistently. Repair centers restorative practices that hold individuals accountable, address harm, and rebuild relationships.

The Schools Model is derived from two programs in two districts: a restorative practices program in the Escondido Union High School District (EUHSD) and the Building Belonging initiative in the San Dieguito Union High School District (SDUHSD).

It is important to note that the districts vary in critical ways. For instance, SDUHSD has twice as many schools and approximately twice as many students. SDUHSD is predominantly white while EUHSD is majority Latino. At SDUHSD, less than five percent of families have incomes below the poverty line compared to 12 percent at EUHSD, and median household income at SDUHSD is more than double that of EUHSD.[1]

Despite their significant differences, both school districts have experienced prominent bias incidents in recent years that have impacted belonging. In 2018, nine high school seniors in EUHSD took a photograph wearing T-shirts with letters on them that spelled out a racial slur when they lined up next to each other.[2] In 2021, an EUHSD basketball team, composed mostly of Latino students, had tortillas thrown at them by fans of the opposing team from a predominantly white high school.[3] Between 2021 and 2023, there have been multiple instances of racist and homophobic graffiti found at SDUHSD schools.[4] In 2022, an SDUHSD middle school history teacher displayed a Hitler portrait and made insensitive comments to a student.[5]

---

[1] National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, America's Public Schools. https://nces.ed.gov.ccd/

[2] Sanchez, R. (2018, October 1). California high school students line up to spell out racial slur at senior picnic. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/29/us/california-high-school-studentsracial-slur-trnd/index.html

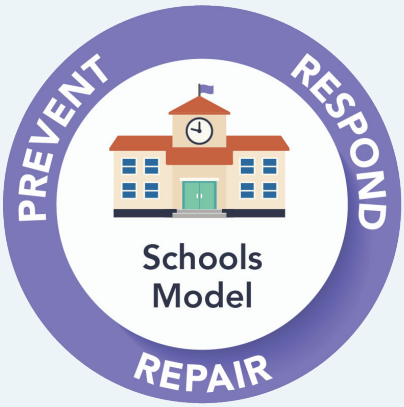
[3] Gros, C. (2021, June 24). Escondido Union HS District unanimously passes racism resolution after tortilla-throwing incident. CBS8. https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/local/escondido-union-hs-district-to-pass-racismresolution-after-basketball-incident/509-61eb955b-d374-4edb-b139-012d672620f8

[4] Taketa, K. (2023, October 12). Antisemitic graffiti painted on the Torrey Pines High School campus–again. The San Diego Union-Tribune. https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/education/story/2023-10-12/antisemiticgraffiti-swastika-torrey-pines-high-school-campus-again

[5] Gotfredson, D. (2022, October 4). Carmel Valley principal apologizes for Hitler portrait in classroom. CBS8. https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/investigations/carmel-valleyprincipal-apologizes-hitler-portrait-in-classroom/509-21328c49-f0e3-4e4c-8259124c5bcd51d4

The benefit of evaluating programs across two districts with different student characteristics is that it allows us to observe the different ways that NCRC integrates into districts with different needs. Activities that are needed in one district may not be needed in another. The same can be true of schools within districts. Therefore, while the Schools Model involves more elements when looking across multiple districts, it is important to recognize that districts vary, and the model will necessarily have to be adapted to different contexts.

Schools Model: Prevent, Respond, Repair



The Schools Model is organized around three interconnected practices: preventing harm, responding effectively when conflict or harmful behavior occurs, and repairing its effects. The aim of the Schools Model is to strengthen belonging and create school environments in which harmful and exclusionary behavior is less likely to occur

Prevention begins with training for school leaders, teachers, staff, and students who need concepts and skills for preventing harm and increasing belonging. Teaching students how to be upstanders rather than bystanders when they see something harmful happening, or giving teachers the skills to run proactive restorative circles in their classroom, can prevent harm and build belonging. These skills and concepts help to build a culture of belonging, which can prevent harmful and exclusionary actions from happening.

When an incident does occur, a clear and appropriate response is critical. Administrators, teachers, staff, and students each have different roles to play, and everyone should understand what those roles are. The process for responding to harm should be clear and transparent so that it is predictable and builds trust that harm will be addressed. That includes well-documented steps for administrators, teachers, and staff appropriate to their roles and actions students can take to care for themselves and others who have been harmed.

Repair should occur through a restorative process. This involves teachers or other school personnel using restorative questions to understand what happened and relying on restorative practices such as restorative conferences rather than exclusionary forms of discipline such as suspension. Consistent use of these approaches depends on a culture of being restorative where school personnel view restorative practices as supportive of school priorities and an appropriate way to hold individuals accountable.

These three elements reinforce one another. Effective responses should include opportunities for repair, while restorative responses can strengthen relationships and contribute to preventing future incidents. Prevent, respond, and repair is therefore not a simple linear sequence, but an interconnected cycle in which each practice supports the others and contributes to a stronger sense of belonging.

PREVENT

To increase belonging, resilience, and justice, schools can work to prevent the behaviors and exclusions that lead to harm and justice system impacts. The Schools Model focuses on building the skills, relationships, and shared expectations that can reduce the likelihood of harm occurring in the first place.

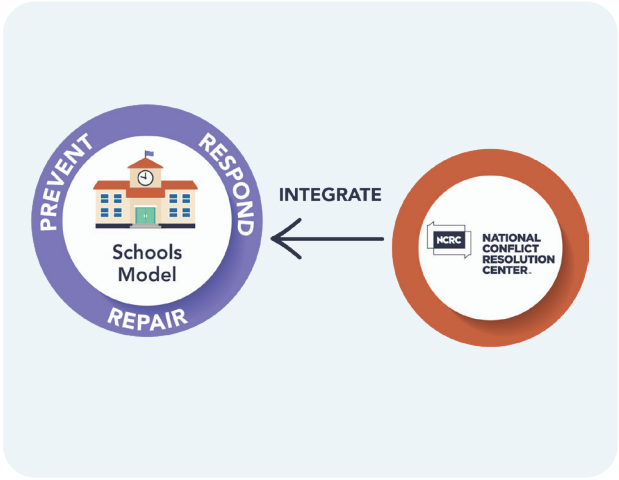
RESPOND

When an incident happens, it is not only critical that there is a response but also that the response is appropriate, helps build belonging, and contributes to the prevention of future incidents.

REPAIR

Responding to an incident or to more persistent issues is the first step in repairing harm and building a greater sense of belonging. Restorative practices are essential to repairing harm. People need restorative skills, and schools need a culture of restorative justice to ensure that people and communities harmed are repaired and the person or people who cause harm are held accountable. Restorative practices can take more effort than more exclusionary forms of discipline. Even for teachers and staff who are bought in to using restorative practices, it can be easier to resort to detentions or suspensions. Yet repairing harm is critical to belonging, resilience, and justice in schools.

Integrate, Collaborate, Lead

A multi-institutional framework with distinct but overlapping models of youth engagement requires different approaches to partnerships between an organization like NCRC and the institutions it supports. A community-based organization will take on different roles and develop different relationships as they work across schools, the justice system, and the community. Integrating, collaborating, and leading are ways of engaging that show up in each of the models. However, each represents a dominant mode of engaging with a particular model.

Community-based organizations should integrate their programming into schools. This means adapting programs to the specific school environment and ensuring that programs support school priorities. When programs are perceived as adding responsibilities or distracting from other demands, they may struggle to get buy-in. Although changing school culture and behaviors is a goal of the Schools Model, these changes are most achievable when programs are integrated into the needs and day-to-day functioning of the school. Integrating the Schools Model into a specific school environment takes time and learning on the part of the organization supporting the school.