



AT THIS SCHOOL, STUDENT DISCIPLINE IS OFTEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN



At Hinkley High School in Aurora, Colorado, when students get in trouble in school, they also get an opportunity to learn. It's all part of the school's "culture of care" and its commitment to professional support and collaboration.

Hinkley's staff members regularly ask themselves, "What are we doing to meet the needs of all kids?" As part of the school's exemplary professional development, the teachers form Professional Learning Teams, which are organized by grade and content areas. The teams support new teachers, review common classroom assessments, share lesson plans for feedback, and align course content. PLTs also support teams of special education, English language acquisition, and content area teachers as they develop inclusion-focused co-teaching strategies.

Since 2011, the school has embraced restorative justice (RJ), an approach that teaches students, educators, and parents to revolve conflicts by changing behaviors, talking things through, repairing harm, and improving communication.

"I now have the tools to talk things out before acting upon my anger," Hinkley student Erisha James explained in a [piece](#) that ran recently in *The Washington Post's* Answer Sheet column. "I have learned that not everything has to be settled with a physical disagreement. Words are more powerful than anything else, once you sit down and let everything out. I have watched my life change just by sitting and fixing the harm and restoring the love that was broken."

Hinkley was featured in *The Post* as part of a series on schools recognized by the National Education Policy Center's [Schools of Opportunity](#) program. The initiative showcases public

high schools that provide all students with an equitable and excellent education. Hinkley was one of eight schools honored in 2017.

During the site visit by the School of Opportunity evaluation team, when students were asked by the visitors about bullying, they responded, “that doesn’t happen here.” Other students described widespread support for LGBTQIA students. When students were then asked what they would do if witnessing someone being bullied, students readily answered, “RJ.”

At Hinkley, restorative justice is a major aspect of creating opportunities for everyone to learn at the school. Prior to the introduction of this approach, the 2,108-student school struggled with gang violence and high rates of suspension and expulsion. Once the school adopted restorative justice, total disciplinary referrals fell 47 percent over four years, according to *The Post* piece.

More on Hinkley High School:

This school once had a reputation for violence. Here’s how that changed. *The Washington Post*.

Hinkley High School recognized for ‘opportunity’ achievement. *The Aurora Sentinel*.

What other schools can learn from two Colorado Schools of Opportunity. *Chalkbeat Colorado*.

Hinkley High School official website.

William C Hinkley High School. Schools of Opportunity website.

More on Schools of Opportunity:

Schools of Opportunity website

NEPC Resources on Discipline Policy

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