

**Author:** Laura Nugent

**Title of Study:** The Incidence and Effects of Residential and School Mobility on Students with Disabilities

**Overview:**

The purpose of this research project is to determine impact of residential and school transiency upon students with disabilities. Transiency is defined as movement and enrollment from one school to another during the school year for reasons other than school promotion. Research questions will address transient populations generally, but maintain a focus on the experiences of students with disabilities as told by school personnel. The primary research questions concern how transient student experiences differ among general and special education populations, and whether school personnel observe and respond differently to these two student populations. We posit that the residential and household factors that stimulate school transiency will likely differ among student populations with greater academic and learning challenges. We believe this is true as such learning challenges increase with a decrease in household wealth and status. Residential mobility and school transiency increase with a decrease in household wealth. One objective, therefore, is to better understand and differentiate the causal reasons for household mobility among transient students across the learning needs spectrum. In addition, this research will focus on the organizational response to mobile students with and without documented learning needs. Students that present as new school enrollees, we posit, will have substantially different adult interactions at the school, intake and registration processes, attendance patterns. They may therefore also experience classroom teaching differently. A secondary objective of this research is therefore to understand how school personnel and their related procedures contribute to differential educational experiences for mobile students with and without learning needs. Finally, we believe these differential educational experiences may also impact general

education student experiences in classrooms with proportionately higher levels of transient students with exceptional needs.

In the first part of our research, data was drawn from interviews with school administrators and teachers, across multiple school districts in Vermont. In the second part, we will focus on response on these practices by interviewing school age students. This will result in development and publication of a guidebook of best practices for education professionals.

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**Author:** Alice Woodruff

**Title of Study:** Seeking a Diagnosis: Families' Experiences Searching for, and Receiving, a Disability Diagnosis for their Child

**Overview:**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to analyze the experiences of families of children with developmental disabilities when seeking and receiving a disability diagnosis. While developmental disabilities vary in characteristics, and the age of recognition of a child's challenges differs greatly, each family of an affected child undergoes a process of diagnosis that often represents a profound moment in the families' lives. Graungaard (2006) states that this process has a key influence on "parents' experiences of both emotional themes such as perception of the future, realization of the child's condition and the perception of the child, as well as on more concrete themes such as the information and communication with doctors, and the experiences of hospitalization". Other studies showed that this was a critical time period for families in which they had the greatest needs for educational information, emotional support, and formal and informal social networks (Rahi et al., 2004). Other families of children with developmental disabilities may never receive a diagnosis. One study regarding families who have never received a diagnosis noted that "having a diagnosis would, for some parents, provide psychological relief," (Lewis et al.,

2010). Considering the wide range of disabilities, evaluation periods, age of diagnosis, family style, and socioeconomic statuses of families sharing this common experience, it is expected that experiences will differ in some aspects. Regardless, it is important to study possible themes across experiences to better grasp the complex social and emotional experiences of families, and the implications of having this “label”. Many parents of children with disabilities have shared their experiences through memoirs and novels; however, qualitative research studies analyzing themes in parents’ experiences through this process of diagnosis are not as well documented. More research is necessary to synthesize themes in parental experiences comprehending information, communication with healthcare professionals, coping with the diagnosis, changing their views for the future, and seeking emotional support, among others.

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**Authors:** Amanda Payne, Nicholar Grudev, & Fern Aguda-Brown

**Title of Study:** Using Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) to Revise the Burlington High School Student Handbook \_\_\_\_\_

**Overview:**

The proposed research endeavor aims to work with youth from Burlington High School (BHS) in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project that seeks to gain student voice in revising behavioral expectations and discipline policies within the BHS student handbook using the principles of restorative justice.

Restorative Practice (RP) in schools is rooted in the paradigm of restorative justice. As stated by Howard Zehr (2002), restorative justice rests upon “the belief that we are *all* connected through a web of relationships and when a wrongdoing has occurred, the web becomes torn” (as cited in Kline 2016, p. 97). Restorative justice is a world-view adopted from non-western, indigenous peoples around the world that

understands crime and wrongdoing as harm done to people and communities (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). When wrongdoing occurs within a restorative justice model, all stakeholders involved are given an opportunity to participate in discussions about the incident, to process who was affected and how the community was impacted, and to determine collectively what needs to be done to repair the harm (Zehr, 2002). RP can perhaps be best described as the expression and operationalization of restorative justice in schools: an umbrella of tools that school staff and faculty can use for prevention, to establish positive relationships with all school stakeholders, and to repair relations that have been damaged by conflict and harm (Kline, 2016).

In contrast to restorative justice, the criminal justice system and schools around the world have been colonized by Western practices of retributive justice. Rather than viewing harm as a violation of people and relationships, retributive justice views wrongdoing as the breaching of laws and rules. Rather than aiding the agent of harm in understanding their obligations to repair community relationships, retributive justice apportions blame. Rather than asking how the harm can be repaired, retributive justice asks what punishment must be imposed (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). The paradigm of retributive justice as practiced in schools results in zero tolerance and exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately hurt children from traditionally marginalized groups such as children with disabilities, children of color, and children from poor and working class families. The result of retributive practices in schools leads to academic failure, dropout, and the school-to-prison pipeline amongst such groups (Kline, 2016; Payne & Welch, 2015). Recent data collected by the Burlington School Board suggests that a disparity in discipline exists for students from traditionally marginalized groups. Therefore, the authors of this proposal are working in collaboration with representatives from the Burlington School District to support the research and development of restorative practices to achieve the following goals: lowering suspension rates across the board, including inequitable suspension rates across racial, socioeconomic and ability-status lines, reducing achievement gaps amongst traditionally

marginalized groups of students, and improving school climate for all. An important component to meeting the proposed goals is ensuring that behavioral expectations and discipline processes in the student handbook are informed by the opinions and views of those directly affected by these policies - the students. YPAR is a vehicle for this process as it levels the hierarchy between students and school staff, and empowers youth to design, implement and analyze data that can be used by the administration and students to revise the handbook.

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**Authors:** Alyxandra Herbert, Taylor Stephens, & Stephanie Volkmar

**Title:** What is the Experience of School Counselors in Schools that Engage in Restorative Practices?: A Qualitative Study

**Overview:**

Restorative Practice (RP) in schools is rooted in the paradigm of restorative justice, a relational conceptualization of crime or rule-breaking as harm done to people and communities (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). That is, when harm occurs in a community or school, all stakeholders involved with the harm are given an opportunity to participate in discussions about the incident, to process who was affected and how it has impacted the community, and to determine collectively what needs to be done to repair the harm (Zehr, 2002). RP can perhaps be best described as the expression and operationalization of restorative justice in schools: an umbrella of tools that school staff and faculty can use for prevention, to establish positive relationships with all school stakeholders, and to repair relations that have been damaged by conflict and harm (Kline, 2016).

Further, the American School Counseling Association (2002) states the primary function of school counselors is to assist all students in developing the skills needed for academic success, career and college readiness, and personal/social development. For almost two decades

now, the profession of school counseling has acknowledged that students from traditionally marginalized and minoritized groups face emotional, physical, social and economic inequities that hinder their success, readiness and development (ASCA, 2006; Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). Therefore, an emphasis on social justice advocacy, i.e. a prevention posture towards the elimination of unjust barriers along with the building of more equitable systems, has become integral to school counselor identity and to the scope of practice (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Ratts, DeKruyf, Chen- Hayes, 2007). To that end, the American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) National Model calls upon school counselors to value, respect and be responsive to students from traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups, and to advocate for such students by identifying "systemic barriers to student achievement" (2012, p. 8). Additionally, the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors call upon school counselors to "work as advocates and leaders in the school to create equity-based school counseling programs that help close any achievement, opportunity, and attainment gaps" (ASCA, 2010). Although the school counseling field has called on school counselors to advocate and support students from traditionally marginalized groups, it has yet to call attention to the most subversive and pervasive systemic impediment to student success: the punitive justice system that dominates U.S. schools. Furthermore, the extant literature is clear that there is a correlation between school suspension rates and a decrease in academic achievement (Morris & Perry, 2016). It is time for school counselors to take up the work of shaping and influencing systems of discipline within schools.

Thus, Dr. Lance Smith and his research team of graduate students at the University of Vermont submitted a manuscript illustrating the hand-in-glove fit between RP and professional school counseling. The manuscript was recently accepted by the premier top-tier journal in the field, *Professional School Counseling*. Within the manuscript, the authors suggest that there is a natural alignment between the underlying principles and aims of professional school counseling and the principles

and aims of RP. Both seek to promote positive well-being, growth and development, and academic success. Both seek to empower students, foster self-efficacy, and promote adaptive social skills (Kline, 2016; Wright, 2012). Following this article's acceptance, the associate editor of *Professional School Counseling* requested qualitative data on the experience of school counselors in schools that have implemented restorative practices.

Therefore, this research project aims to expand the discussion on the implementation of RP in schools as it relates to the role of the school counselor. Schools across the state of Vermont are in varying stages of implementation. The VT Agency of Education has noted it's interested in RP in Section 35 of Act 153 to consider the extant research on RP's impact on educational outcomes. This research project will assess interviews from approximately 8-10 school counselors in order to ascertain the connection between RP and school counseling best practices, the perception of the impact of RP on school climate and the achievement gap, and their experience in the implementation process. At this point, the UVM RP research team has conducted qualitative interviews with seven VT school counselors. We have used the previous Jean Garvin Grant monies to buy voice recorders, transcription peddles, and to receive RP Training from John Kidde and Lisa Bedinger. The goal is to complete one or two more interviews and continue transcription. Transcription fees and training new team members in RP are the primary needs to move along the current research. The research team hopes to complete transcription and data analysis by 2017, and hopes to present initial results at Columbia University's Winter Roundtable titled "Nevertheless, She Persisted."