

Lincoln/Lancaster County

Project Restore

Summary

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Project Restore is a program designed and implemented by the Lancaster County Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Committee and implemented by the Lincoln/Lancaster County Department of Human Services. Project Restore is the capstone project of the Lancaster County RED Committee's participation in the Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities Program at the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy. Project Restore began implementation in October of 2015 with approval by the Lincoln Public Schools (LPS), the Lancaster County Attorney's Office, the Lincoln Police Department (LPD), and Lincoln/Lancaster County Department of Human Services. The program is administered through the Lincoln/Lancaster County Department of Human Services.

Project Restore is primarily an early intervention/diversion program to prevent youth from unnecessarily entering and moving into the juvenile justice system and an effort to reduce racial and ethnic disparities at and following prosecutorial decision entry point. Analysis of Lincoln racial and ethnic juvenile justice disparity data indicated that arrest and juvenile justice system entry from offenses originating within schools is a point at which disparities are visible in the data for assaultive and disturbing the peace offenses.

Project Restore does not impact the reporting of offenses within the schools but provides a higher level of discretion at the prosecutorial point than previously existed. Offenses occurring within the Lincoln Public High Schools for youth in the 7th through 10th grades are reported to the Lincoln Police Department as is standard practice. During the first year of the program, only youth in 8th through 10th were eligible. In an effort to increase the number of minority youth eligible for the Project Restore the grade eligibility was lowered to include the 7th grade beginning with the 2016 – 2017 school year.

Project Restore seeks to avoid youth initial entry and further penetration into the juvenile justice system by not filing charges but by holding youth accountable for their behavior through restorative justice practices and encouraging behavior change through interventions and referrals to appropriate programs.

Once LPD reports are processed through to the Lancaster County Attorney's office, that office makes the determination if the youth qualifies for Project Restore based upon the offense reported (assault or disturbing the peace), no prior court referred law violations, and if gang related. Youth committing offenses with serious bodily injury, domestic/sexual assault, and offenses with gang involvement are not eligible to be referred; youth with prior or current law violations that were referred to court or diversion (some offenses) are also not eligible. If eligible, the Lancaster County Attorney's office refers the youth to Project Restore without further action by that office pending acceptance of entry into the program by the youth and

family and/or non-compliance or completion of program requirements. If the youth and family choose not to participate in Project Restore or the victim/family decline the case is processed by the county attorney’s office per standard practice.

Youth Referred and Entering Restore

One-hundred and ninety-seven youth (197) were identified as having been involved in a disturbing the peace or an assault offense that was investigated by the Lincoln Police Department at a Lincoln public middle or high school from November 2015 through December of 2017. One-hundred and twenty youth (120) were eligible and agreed to participate in Project Restore.

The average age of youth reviewed for Restore participation was 14.3 years, ranging from 11 to 16 and the average age for those participating also 14.3 with minimum 11 and maximum 15. Forty percent (40%) reviewed for the programs were female and 39% of those eligible and participating were female. Forty-six percent of those referred were in 9th grade and 40% were in the 10th grade.

Fifty-three percent (104) youth referred to Project Restore were minority youth, (Black, American Indian, Asian, or of Hispanic ethnicity). Most minority youth were black, 87%. Thirty-three youth, 17% of youth referred were of Hispanic ethnicity.

The majority (52%) of youth referred to Project Restore were from three schools, Northeast, 18%, North Star 18%, and Lincoln High 16%. Referrals by school are presented in Appendix.

One hundred and twenty youth (61% of the 197 referrals) were eligible for the program and chose to participate in lieu of standard juvenile justice system process for the cited offense. Forty youth, 52% of youth not accepted into Project Restore were ineligible because of previous offense and a referral to court. An additional 14.3% were not eligible as they had previously been referred to the diversion program, 12% declined to participate, and 5% moved out of the jurisdiction, the full list of reasons are listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Reasons not Eligible or Not in Program		
	Frequency	Percent
Referred to Court	40	51.9
Referred to Diversion	11	14.3
Other	10	13.0
Declined	9	11.7
Not a Charge to File	2	2.6

Serious Bodily Injury	2	2.6
Sexual Assault	2	2.6
Facts insufficient	1	1.3
Total	77	100.00

In contrast to earlier data for Project Restore there is no significant difference in program participation by minority status. There remain small differences in the number so of minority youth not eligible because of a diversion referral: 9 minority youth compared to 2 non-minority youth and 4 more minority youth were ineligible for “other” reasons compared to non-minority youth.

There does remain a statistically significant difference in the number of black youth entering into Project Restore compared with non-minority youth. Sixty-two black youth were referred and 30 of these were ineligible or chose not to enter the program, $\chi^2(3, N = 197) = 0.193, p = .05$. The reasons for this difference are not due to a single reason. Black youth were referred to diversion, moved out of the jurisdiction, and declined to participate at a somewhat higher rate than would be expected.

Offenses Referred

Assault offenses represented 64% of the 197 offenses reported from schools and reviewed for eligibility to Project Restore. The remaining 71 offenses (36%) were for disturbing the peace. There was no statistically significant difference in the type of offense reported and reviewed for Project Restore by minority status.

Process Timeliness

One of the key process elements to the successful implementation of the Project Restore is timeliness of the process from the time of the offense to entry into the program. There are three steps in the initial timeliness measure; receipt of offense report by LPD and sending to the Lancaster County Attorney’s office; the review, decision, and sending by the County Attorney’s office to Project Restore; the time from offence report to first contact with family.

Thirty-nine percent (38.8%) of all offenses investigated by LPD are received at the County Attorney’s office, reviewed, a decision made and sent onto Project Restore on the same day and 95% of all incidents within 7 days of LPD investigation.

The second timeliness measure is days from Project Restore receipt to contact with youth or youth’s family. Fifty-seven percent (56.6%) of contacts with family are made the same day as

the referral is received from the County Attorney's office. All referrals received by Project Restore have a family contact within 8 days of receipt with 94% in 5 days or less.

Finally, the number of days from the time LPD receives offense report to the first meeting date of Project Restore with the youth offender averages 9 days with 86% of 1st meetings within 14 days and 99% within 25 days after the offense report. These timeliness data meet and exceed all the required implementation terms of the project

Activities

Ninety-two youth (77%) participating in Project Restore participated in mediation through the Mediation Center. Thirty-six participating youth (30%) were in mediation in which the victims participated with the offender. Some of these were reciprocal offender/victim offenses.

Youth successfully completing the program were required to meet with the Project Restore Case Manager a minimum of four times. During meetings with the Project Restore, the Case Manager helps youth identify and practice strategies to avoid engaging in disruptive or assaultive behavior in the future. During the final one-on-one meeting, the case manager reviewed the incident, the results of the programming, discussed future appropriate strategies that the student could employ, as well as any identified needs and any appropriate referrals to community-based programming.

One hundred and three youth (85.8%) completed the program successfully with four sessions with the Project Restore Case Manager. The four sessions were on average completed in 55 days from the offense occurring. Fifty-five youth (54%) completing the program did so within the 60-day completion benchmark.

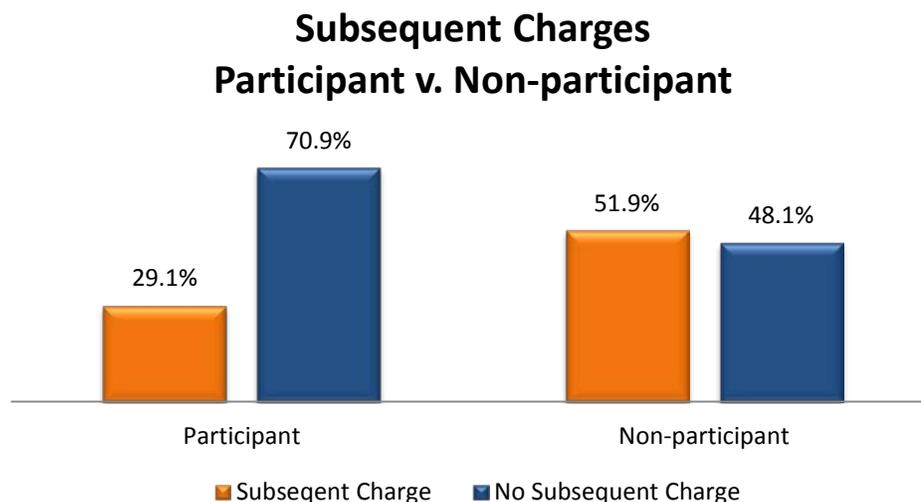
In addition to mediation and required case manager meetings youth also completed other restorative justice activities; 58% of youth completed apology letters to their victims, 21% completed community service activities, and 59% completed a reflection paper. One youth completed restitution to a victim.

Outcomes

The primary individual level outcome to be achieved by Project Restore is that youth will not enter further in the juvenile justice system and that there will be a reduction in repeat behaviors by the offending youth resulting in no additional offenses. There are two components to this outcome the 1) avoidance of entering the juvenile justice system by choosing to participate in Project Restore and 2) no subsequent offenses which would potentially result in further juvenile justice system involvement.

For the first component: Ninety-seven percent (96.9%) of youth eligible for Project Restore avoided further, immediate, juvenile justice system exposure for the referred offense by choosing to participate and completing participation in the program. Fourteen youth were currently in the program at the end of December 2017.

The second component is measured as subsequent offenses investigated by the Lincoln Police Department after youth has completed Project Restore. Seventy-three (73) of the 103 youth or 70.9% accepted into and completing Project Restore had no subsequent offense investigated by the Lincoln Police Department through December of 2017. Thirty youth (29%) that completed Project Restore had a subsequent offense through December 2017. The design of Project Restore does not allow for a control group of youth to compare this re-offense rate with and the only available comparison group available are those youth identified as ineligible for the program, many of which are ineligible because of prior offenses with court involvement. Forty youth (52%) not eligible or that chose not to participate had no subsequent charge through December 2017. Thirty-seven youth (48%) that were not eligible or chose not to participate in Project Restore had a subsequent offense investigated by the Lincoln Police Department through December 2017.



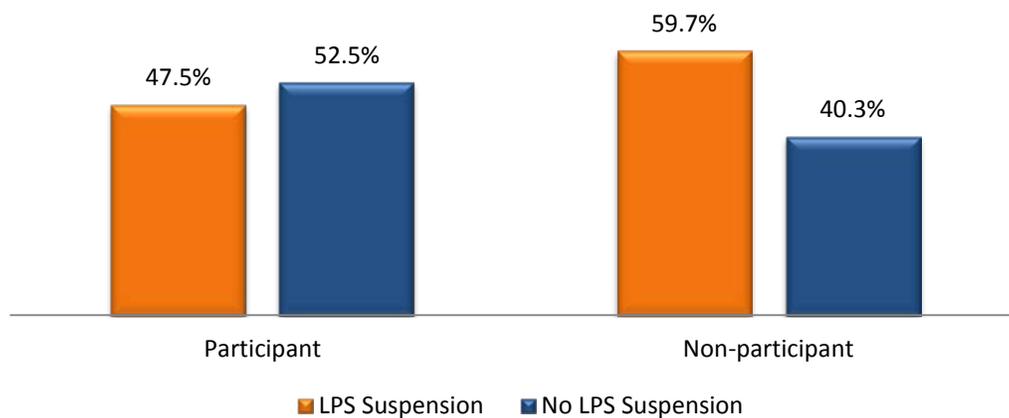
There was no significant difference in subsequent charges of program participants by minority status.

There are limits to assess the effectiveness of Project Restore effectiveness in decreasing the number of youth entering further into the juvenile justice system because of the absence of a true comparison group or a control group. Comparing Project Restore with other diversion type programs summarized by Wilson and Hoge in a meta-analysis of diversion programs there is a wide range of recidivism rates but the average of 73 programs reviewed was 31.5%

recidivism after program completion¹. Using this general benchmark Project Restore has performed similarly to other diversion programs in the percent of youth who re-offend after program completion (29.1%).

An additional outcome examined is Lincoln Public School suspensions after completion of Project Restore. Sixty-three (63) of the 120 in the Project Restore or 52.5% have had no subsequent LPS suspensions through December 2017. There were 31 or 40.3% of the 77 youth not eligible or that chose not to participate that had received subsequent Lincoln Public School suspensions.

Subsequent LPS Suspension Participant v. Non-participant



Project Restore as a diversion program is generating re-offense outcomes similar to 73 other juvenile justice diversion programs and to that extent, it is effective in reducing the further involvement of all youth, including racial and ethnic minorities, into the Lincoln and Lancaster County juvenile justice system.

¹ Wilson, H. A., & Hoge, R. D. (2012; 2013). The effect of youth diversion programs on recidivism: A meta-analytic review *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 40(5), 497 - 518.

Appendix

Referrals by School

	Frequency	Percent
Northeast	36	18.3
North Star	35	17.8
Lincoln High	31	15.7
Southeast	26	13.2
Southwest	20	10.2
Culler	10	5.1
Park	9	4.6
Lefler	5	2.5
Pound	5	2.5
Yankee Hill	5	2.5
Irving	4	2.0
East	3	1.5
Mickle	3	1.5
Goodrich	2	1.0
Scott	2	1.0
Dawes	1	.5
Total	197	100.0

Type of Offense

	Frequency	Percent
Assault	126	64.0
Disturb the Peace	71	36.0
Total	197	100.0

Race

	Frequency	Percent
Caucasian	126	64.0
Black	62	31.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	5	2.5

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Asian	4	2.0
Total	197	100.0

Ethnicity

	Frequency	Percent
Non-Hispanic	164	83.2
Hispanic	33	16.8
Total	197	100.0

Minority Status

	Frequency	Percent
Minority	104	52.8
Non-minority	93	47.2
Total	197	100.0