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Why the ACEs Study Matters for School-Based Restorative Justice

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Healthier communities for all through better laws
and policies.

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AGENDA



- Introduce the ACEs studies and the prevalence of ACEs
- Explore the toll of ACEs and toxic stress
- Examine the role schools can play: mitigate or exacerbate
- An alternative vision for schools: Design Principles
- Restorative Justice Practices and Public Health
- Next Steps + Call to Action + Questions



Why are we here?

Making the connections between:
School discipline + restorative justice + public health



But first, let's talk Social Determinants of Health

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)



- SDoH are conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes and risks.
- Examples of the SDoH include:
 - Economic stability (e.g., employment, housing stability, poverty)
 - Education (e.g., early childhood education, high school graduation)
 - Social and community context (e.g., social cohesion, incarceration)
 - Health and health care (e.g., access to primary care, health literacy)
 - Neighborhood and built environment (e.g., access to healthy foods, crime)



PART I:

Introduction to the ACEs Studies



What are ACEs?

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are “traumatic experiences that can have a profound effect on a child’s developing brain and body with lasting impacts on a person’s health throughout her lifespan.”

1998 Adverse Childhood Experience Study (Felliti, Anda, et al.)



Overview

- Partnership between Kaiser Permanente and the CDC
- Examined exposure to childhood adversity
- Researchers assigned an “ACEs score” to each participant

Key Findings

- ACEs are very common—almost 2/3 of participants reported at least one ACE
- The higher the ACE score, the higher the risk for chronic disease as an adult

Limitations

- Study population disproportionately white, employed, insured, and college education

2013 Philadelphia Urban ACE Survey



Overview

- Interest in examining the prevalence and impact of ACEs in Philadelphia, an urban city with a socially and racially diverse population
- Also examined the stressors in the communities where people lived

Key Findings

- Many Philadelphians experience stressors related to the community where they grow up
- Including the additional urban ACE indicators, 83.2% of adults experienced at least one ACE

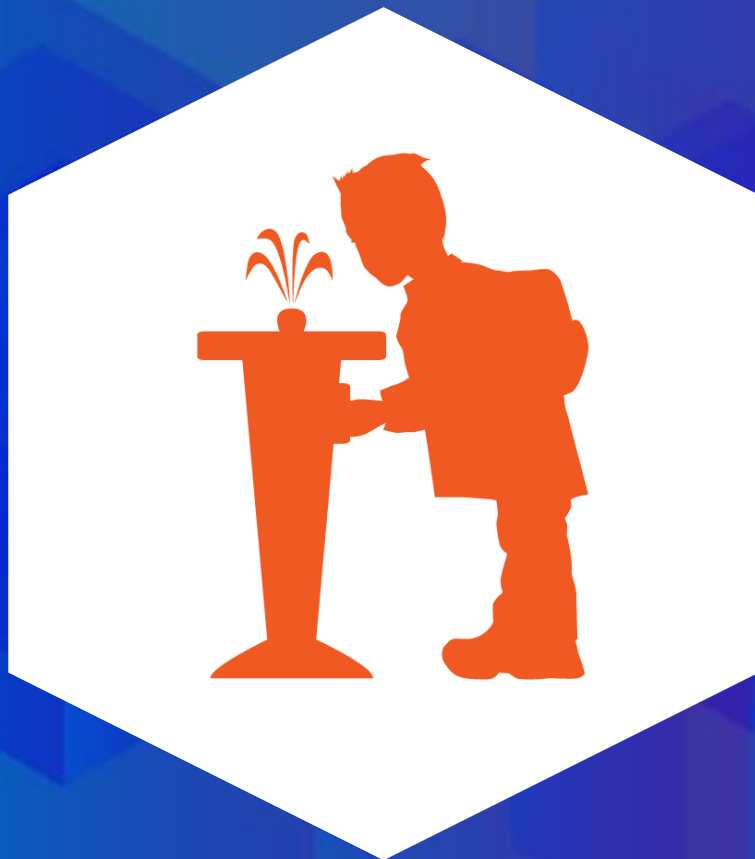
Limitations

- Limited sample size



PART II:

Prevalence of ACEs



45% of all children in
the U.S. have
experienced at least
one ACE.

Prevalence of ACEs

Race or Ethnicity	% of children that have experienced at least one ACE
Black non-Hispanic	61%
Hispanic	51%
White non-Hispanic	40%
Asian non-Hispanic	23%

Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic children of other races are more likely than White children to experience 2 or more ACEs



PART III:

The Toll of ACEs and Toxic Stress



Toxic stress is “the extreme, frequent, or extended activation of the body’s stress response without the buffering presence of a supportive adult.”



The Toll of ACEs and Toxic Stress

ACEs and a student's academic trajectory

- Chronic absenteeism
- Behavioral and learning challenges, and struggles in schools

ACEs and detrimental socioeconomic outcomes

- High school non-completion and household poverty
- Periods of unemployment



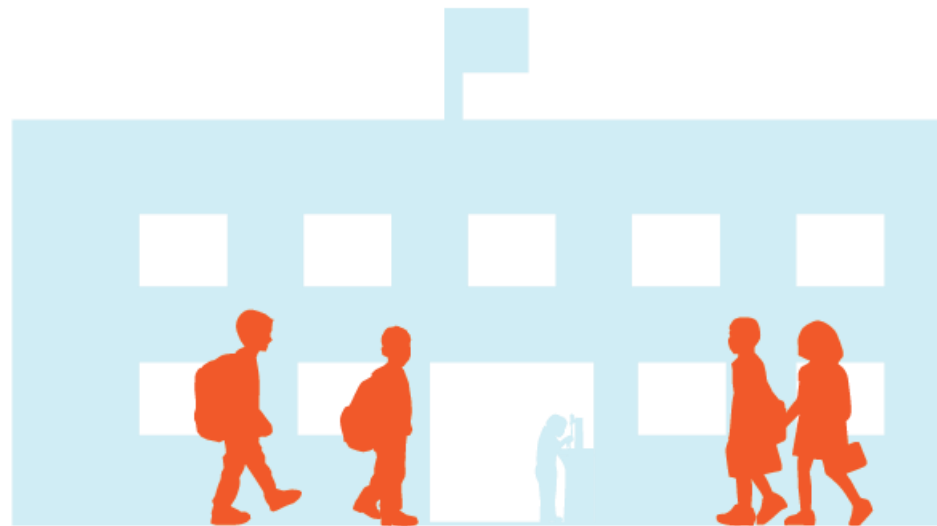
ACEs, toxic stress, and health outcomes

- Increased risk of suicide attempts, sexual risk behaviors, and lifetime depressive episodes
- Disruptions of the metabolic and immune systems
- Lower life expectancy



PART IV:

The Role Schools
Play in Mitigating
or Exacerbating
the Effects of
ACEs and Toxic
Stress



What role do schools play?

Schools can play a critical role in mitigating the effects that ACEs and toxic stress can have on a young person's healthy development and educational success



Despite this, many schools beginning at the pre-K level, continue to suspend and expel students—particularly students of color—at alarming rates.

ESD practices
exacerbate
the effects of
ACEs and
toxic stress



Exclusionary school discipline (ESD) practices undermine **critical protective factors** that can support children's healthy development, even in the face of adversity:

- safe, stable and nurturing relationships
- safe environments
- positive academic experiences

ESD practices can transform schools into spaces that...

...have lower levels of connectivity:

- feelings of mistrust between students and teachers
- social isolation of students



School connectedness
is a stabilizing force in
the lives of youth

ESD practices can transform schools into spaces that...

...have a more limited understanding between families and schools

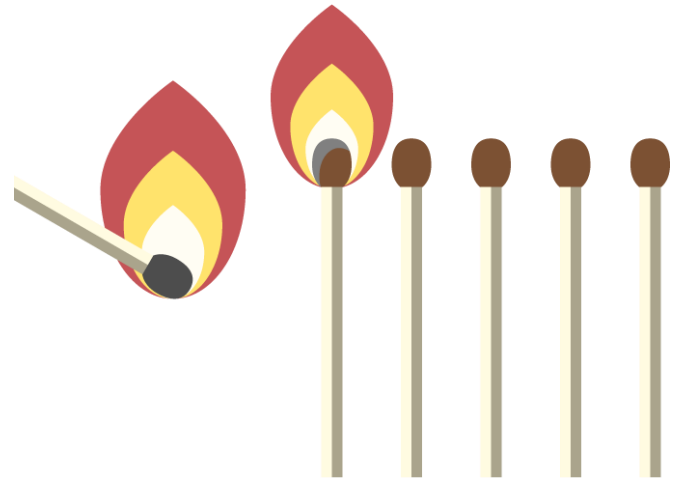
- Linked to negative impacts on parents' views of schools as safe and accepting places



ESD practices can transform schools into spaces that...

...compound stress for students and families

- May retrigger histories of trauma for children with someone in the household who was/is incarcerated



By pushing students out and depriving them of **critical protective factors**, ESD practices exacerbate racial disparities and external stressors that threaten the health and wellbeing of developing children.

These practices undermine the traditional purpose of schools—which is to create a safe, nurturing, learning environment.



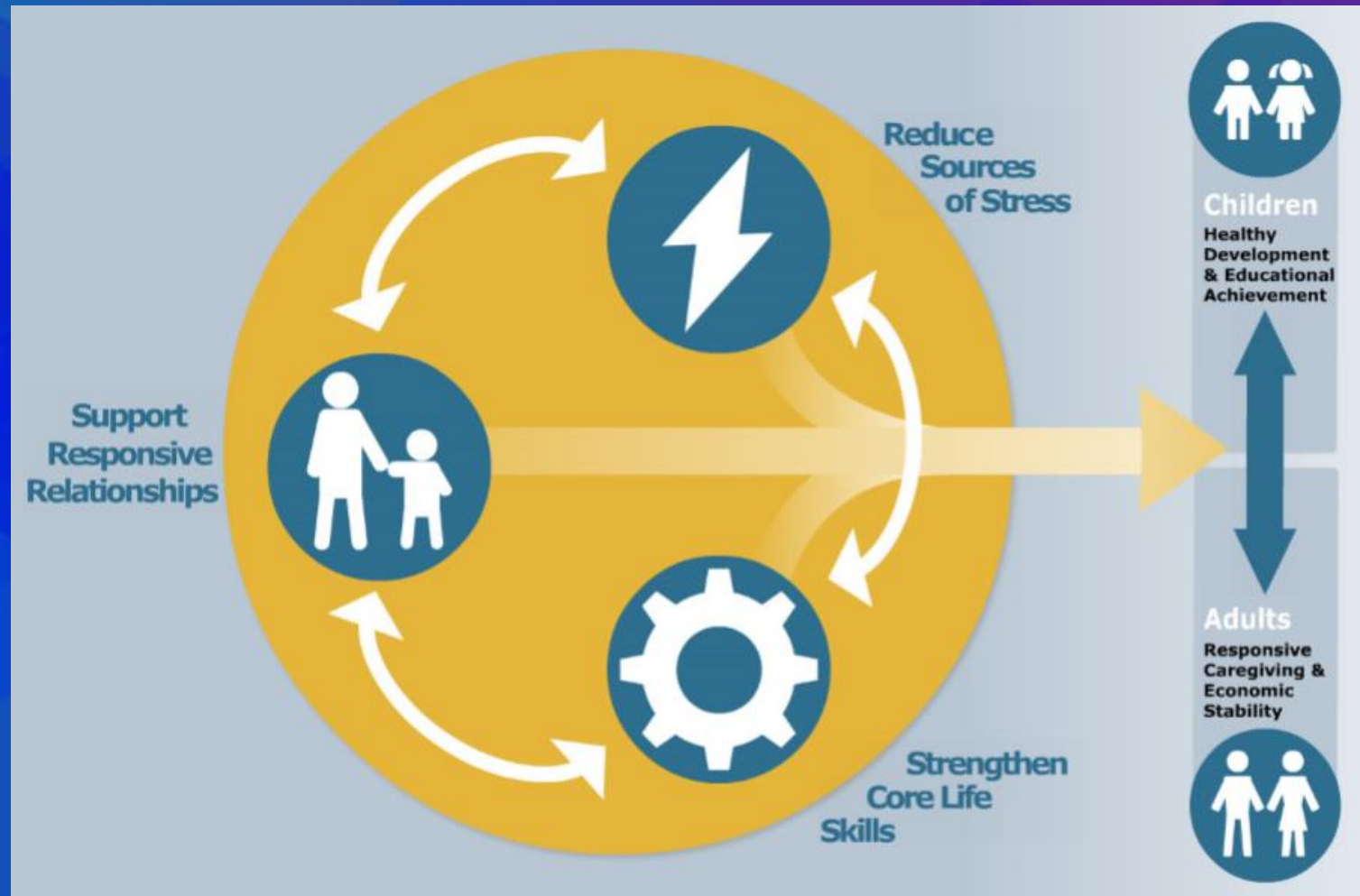
PART V:

An Alternative
Vision for Schools
– Introduction to
the Design
Principles



How can we use alternative approaches to ESD to help more children thrive?

Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families





Design Principle #1: Support Responsive Relationships

Exclusionary School Discipline Practices:

- Fosters feelings of mistrust between students and teachers
- Linked to social isolation of students
- Linked to negative impacts on parents' views of schools as safe and accepting places



Design Principle #2:

Strengthen Core Life Skills

Exclusionary School Discipline Practices:

- Schools that rely too much on these practices forfeit teachable moments that can help students develop skills like self-regulation and self-efficacy



Design Principle #3: Reduce Sources of Stress

Exclusionary School Discipline Practices:

- Produce stressful and negative experiences for children and families (especially at the preschool level)
- May retrigger histories of trauma for children if someone in their household has been or is incarcerated



Supportive alternatives that emphasize healthy development of the whole child positively reinforce each of the three design principles to cultivate healthier school environments, empower students, remove barriers to educational attainment, and equip students with the skills to thrive in and outside of the classroom



PART VI:

Restorative Justice Practices and Public Health



Design Principle #1: Support Responsive Relationships

Restorative justice practices:

- Foster healthy relationships in schools built on a foundation of trust, respect, and care
- A seven-year case study of whole school implementation of restorative practices, including curriculum and student-led practices in high school, produced the following key findings:
 - improved school climate;
 - increased school connectedness; and
 - increased youth efficacy (González, Sattler, and Buth, 2018).



Design Principle #2: Strengthen Core Life Skills

Restorative justice practices:

- A qualitative examination of restorative circles in high school in response to fights, misbehavior, and gang violence produced the following key findings:
 - restorative circles served as an important school-level resilience-building strategy for both educators and students (Knight and Wadhwa, 2014).
- A two-year ethnographic study with adolescent girls in public urban high school produced the following key findings:
 - restorative circles promoted refined anger management, active listening and interpersonal sensitivity—all key aspects of pro-social behavior (Schumacher, 2014).



Design Principle #3: Reduce Sources of Stress

Restorative justice practices:

- Can reduce suspension rates across a school district
- Contributes to the narrowing of the racial-discipline gap for Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic students
- A three-year analysis in elementary school of restorative practices found a decrease in aggression, fights, behavioral referrals, and improved school climate (Riestenberg, 2013).
- Feeling a sense of safety within the school community (Schumacher, 2014)



PART VII:

Recap + Next
Steps + A Call to
Action +
Questions



45% of all children in the U.S. have experienced at least one ACE. However, Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic children face a greater risk of experiencing ACEs



ESD practices exacerbate the effects of ACEs and toxic stress



Students at greater risk of experiencing 1 or more ACEs are being pushed out of schools at a disproportionate rate, raising health equity concerns



There is growing momentum around an alternative vision for schools, grounded in science, that mitigates the effects of ACEs and toxic stress, and supports students to reach their full potential



Looking Ahead

- Greater need for examining how populations with different intersectional identities experience ESD practices (see e.g., *Adultification* report)
- Milwaukee research around working with youth
- Working together: educators + advocates to promote health justice



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Resources for changemaking:

- Youth Policy Playbook
- Stay tuned for our *Issue Brief*

For these and other resources, visit us at
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Keep the conversation going

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Thank you! Questions?