Growing Fairness is a short documentary film about “growing” restorative justice in city schools. Often, passionate educators lead these cultural shifts in schools. Growing Fairness examines the historical and political context for their resistance against the norm. It also shares the voices of youth who have seized the opportunity to lead, transforming their schools and themselves in the process.

“Restorative Justice has the potential to help us move from an ethic of domination, separation, and competition to an ethic of collaboration, inclusivity, and interrelatedness. I think it’s profoundly radical.”

–Fania Davis, interviewed in Growing Fairness

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HOST A SCREENING!

Gather your friends, colleagues, and neighbors, organize a community viewing, or use to kickstart your school’s discussion of Restorative Justice. Download the film and use this viewing guide to spark your conversation.

Teachers Unite can lead a workshop about growing fairness in your school or organization. A workshop is a way to begin a relationship with Teachers Unite and join our community. Workshop participants will also receive access to our educator-created and tested Toolkit.

GO TO TeachersUnite.net FOR MORE INFORMATION
about the film

Funded through a foundation grant and a successful Indiegogo campaign, filmed and edited by a small team over the course of a year, *Growing Fairness* serves as a response to the requests made to Teachers Unite from organizations across the country for resources developed and used by educators that help schools create a safe community for all.

**Why tell a story about school climate and culture?**

Research shows that punitive school discipline policies, like suspensions, do not reduce conflict, but instead increase the likelihood that students will fall behind, drop out and/or become incarcerated. *Growing Fairness* explores the impact of this phenomenon in New York City, where the number of student suspensions in public schools spiked dramatically over the past decade while the length of suspensions grew longer—a phenomenon disproportionately affecting Black students, according to a report released by the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Student Safety Coalition. Analyzing 10 years of previously undisclosed suspension data, the report shows that black students, who comprise 33 percent of the student body, served 53 percent of suspensions. Black students also served longer suspensions on average and were more likely to be suspended for subjective misconduct, like profanity and insubordination. A key factor contributing to this educational crisis is the negative climate for learning that exists in many schools serving low-income youth of color.

How can schools try to stop this trend?

*Growing Fairness* takes an in-depth look at the use of restorative practices in New York City schools. The documentary focuses on several common forms of restorative practices practiced in schools: Fairness Committees, community-building circles, peer mediation, and restorative peer juries. These practices are proactive measures that emphasize accountability and allow minor conflicts to act as learning opportunities rather than destructive moments in the lives of young people.
CIRCLE PROCESS
Circles are often the context in which more formal restorative practices occur. Some communities use a special centerpiece and a talking piece to make the space more democratic. Circles can be proactive tools to build relationships between students and staff, or reactive in that they address an ongoing issue (chronic lateness, for instance), harm that has been done, or damage to a community.

TALKING PIECE
The mode of regulating the conversation during Circle Process, so that each person has an equal opportunity to speak; only the person with the talking piece may speak.

PERSON WHO WAS HARMED/ PERSON WHO CREATED HARM
An alternate framework to victim/perpetrator, it separates the doer from the deed and acknowledges that the harm can be repaired and the relationship can be restored.

FAIRNESS COMMITTEE
A fairness committee seeks to create, through dialogue and by consensus—including the person who created harm—appropriate responses for community norm violations, rather than simply mete out prescribed punishments. Can be a committee of peers or peer/teachers.

JUSTICE PANEL
Like a Fairness Committee, a Justice Panel seeks to identify positive solutions to the harm done to the community. Common positive solutions include mediation, community service, and conflict resolution. The Justice Panel featured in the film does not include the person who created the harm in the development of the solution. This is not strictly considered a restorative justice process, but serves as a positive alternative to suspension.

These questions are merely meant to guide you—a place to start your discussion. Feel free to follow the conversation that occurs naturally around your exploration of the film. And by all means, if you think of a great question, pass it along so we can add it to the guide!

BEFORE VIEWING

- What makes something fair?
- Tell or write about a time you were treated unfairly. How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
- How do you define community?
- Talk about a community you’ve been part of. What made that community important to you?
- What is the current culture of your school? Your classroom?
- Describe your classroom or staff management style in three words. Pick one word to share and write a sentence elaborating on it.
- True or False: I feel I know my students as individuals.
- Where do our ideas about punishment and discipline come from?
- What would make schools safer spaces?
- Think about a person, a group of people, or a community you trust. How did you go about building that trust?
- What is justice and how do we know when it’s been served?
- What do you already know about Restorative Justice? What excites you about it? What questions do you have about it?
AFTER VIEWING

• What surprised, angered, or shocked you most about the film?

• What delighted or inspired you?

• Nicholas Merchant Bleiberg said, “Restorative Justice. The vocabulary is important—you’re restoring something. But if there’s nothing to restore, you can’t go too far afield with non-punitive measures. The front end is the most important work. It’s the ‘whole work’ in some ways.” What does he mean by “front end”? Do you agree or disagree and why?

• How might you use Circle Process to build your “front end”? Brainstorm what that might look like.

• How are students able to build leadership at your school?

• What reservations might people have about utilizing restorative measures in lieu of traditional punitive disciplinary measures?

• Why is it important that we think about how we, as individuals, are “keeping my students in school, or pushing them out of school,” as Sarah Glasband stated in the film?

• Damon Hewitt from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund said in the film, “Adult responses to student behavior often occur through a racialized lens.” Have you seen this play out in your school community? If so, how?

• Can restorative justice work within our current environment of High Stakes Testing?

• What are factors that might impede your ability to incorporate Restorative Justice into your school? What resources or supports do you need in order to be successful?

• What can Restorative Justice do for your classroom, your school culture, or your community?
about Teachers Unite

Who we are and what we do...

Teachers Unite is an independent membership organization of public school educators in New York City collaborating with youth and parents to transform the city’s and the nation’s public schools. We resist institutions that segregate and criminalize Black and Latin@ youth, such as the School-to-Prison Pipeline, by organizing educators to work as allies in local and national campaigns for social and economic justice. We develop and share resources for restorative justice and school-based power-building that promote grassroots leadership in public education, and we conduct collaborative research on pressing educational issues. We believe that schools can only be transformed when educators work with and learn from parents and youth to achieve social and economic justice.

Teachers Unite members work to change New York City’s school discipline policies as the only educator members of the Dignity in Schools Campaign—New York, a coalition of youth, parents, and advocates fighting to end school pushout & racially disproportionate discipline and promoting alternatives to punitive discipline and policing in NYC. Teachers Unite is also a member of the national Dignity in Schools Campaign. Find out more at DignityinSchools.org.

Teachers Unite members also lead School Partnerships to support the development of sustainable, collaborative leadership teams among staff, parents and students who are committed to transforming their school’s culture through the adoption of restorative justice practices. Members also organize and host Restorative Justice School Visits, in which a school opens their doors to other schools to collaborate and share ideas about implementing restorative justice. Check out TeachersUnite.net/GrowingFairness for more information.

How you can join the movement to grow fairness in schools ...

✔ Join Teachers Unite. Your membership strengthens the fight against the segregation and criminalization of students and builds the movement for transformative justice in schools.

✔ Spread the word! Tell friends, colleagues, and neighbors about “Growing Fairness” and hold a screening.

✔ Submit a testimonial about your school’s relationship with restorative justice practices and include tools that would be useful for other stakeholders in bringing restorative practices to their schools.

✔ Get involved: attend monthly meetings and open houses. Recruit others from your school to do the same.

We want to hear from you!

Why did you decide to host a screening of “Growing Fairness”? How did you go about finding folks to invite? Who was in attendance? How did the discussion go? What things are you still thinking about? What things do you wish you had more information about? Do you have any tips for other people thinking about hosting a screening? Tell us your story! Email info@teachersunite.net.