

There is insufficient evidence to know whether recovery high schools and collegiate recovery communities are effective



Evidence that RHSs may improve academic and substance use outcomes is based on the findings from a single study with a serious risk of bias.

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the effects of recovery schools on student behavioral and academic outcomes, compared to the effects of non-recovery schools. The review summarizes evidence from one quasi-experimental study (with a total of 194 participants) that had potential serious risk of bias due to confounding.

Very limited evidence addresses the effectiveness of recovery high schools (RHSs). There is no rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of collegiate recovery communities (CRCs).

What is this review about?

Based on the results of one study, RHSs may reduce high school students' school absenteeism, marijuana use, and other drug use, and increase abstinence from drugs; but RHSs may be no better or worse than other high schools in improving grades, reducing truancy, or reducing alcohol use.

It is unclear whether CRCs are effective in promoting academic success and reducing substance use among college students.

What are the main findings of this review?

Sizable portions of youth are in recovery from substance use disorders, and many youth will return to use after receiving substance use treatment. Youth spend most of their waking hours at school, and thus schools are important social environments for youth in recovery from substance use disorders. Recovery schools have been identified as educational programs that may help support youth in recovery from substance use disorders.

This review focused on two types of recovery schools: RHSs, which are schools that award secondary school diplomas and offer a range of therapeutic services in addition to standard educational curricula; and CRCs, which offer therapeutic and sober support services on college campuses.

This review looked at whether recovery schools (RHSs or CRCs) affect academic success and substance use outcomes among students, compared to similar students who are not enrolled in recovery schools.



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies until September 2018. This Campbell systematic review was published in October 2018.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by the authors of the Campbell Systematic Review 2018:9 “Recovery schools for improving behavioral and academic outcomes among students in recovery from substance use disorders: a systematic review” by Emily A. Hennessy, Emily E. Tanner-Smith, Andrew J. Finch, Nila Sathe, Shannon Kugley (DOI 10.4073/csr.2018:9). Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) redesigned and edited the summary. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.

What studies are included?

The included study of recovery high schools used a controlled quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design and reported on the following outcomes: grade point average, truancy, school absenteeism, alcohol use, marijuana use, other drug use, and abstinence from alcohol/drugs. The included study focused on a sample of U.S. high school students. There were no eligible studies of CRCs.

Rigorous evaluations of recovery school effects are needed

What do the findings of this review tell us?

Findings from this review indicate insufficient evidence on the effects of recovery schools on student well-being. Although there is some indication RHSs may improve academic and substance use outcomes, this is based on the findings from a single study. There is no available evidence on the effects of CRCs.

No strong conclusions can be drawn at this time, given the lack of available evidence on RHSs and CRCs, and the serious risk of bias in the one RHS study included in the review. The evidence from this review suggests there is a clear need for additional rigorous evaluations of recovery school effects prior to widespread implementation.

