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Restorative Justice Conferencing In Rhode Island: Summary Report

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Abstract

Harsh approaches to school discipline and safety may have unintended consequences that negatively affect students. Exclusionary discipline and the criminalization of minor infractions have been shown to limit student achievement and labeling research shows that official sanctions can increase youth involvement in antisocial behavior while also increasing punitive responses, as part of the "school-to-prison" pipeline. Moreover, a growing body of evidence finds that these sanctions are often applied disproportionately to youth of color. Restorative justice provides an alternative that can improve school safety without the punitive culture currently found in many schools. Restorative justice focuses on repairing harm to victims as opposed to retribution for offenses. Because of its focus on inclusion, accountability, and the community, restorative justice within school settings is a promising approach that warrants greater examination.

The Central Falls School District in partnership with other local educational agencies (LEAs) in Rhode Island implemented restorative justice conferencing in both middle and high schools. A restorative justice conference is a highly structured, facilitated meeting that allows affected parties (e.g., offending student, victim, teacher) and their allies (e.g., parents, peers) to arrive at the best possible solution for all following a negative event or behavior. Conferences were conducted by the Youth Restoration Project.

The Urban Institute conducted a process and outcome evaluation, in partnership with Data Spark at the University of Rhode Island (formerly the Providence Plan), a data intermediary that possesses the administrative data needed for the project. An implementation report is summarized in Chapter II of this summary report; results from teacher surveys and focus groups are summarized in Chapter III; fidelity of conference implementation is summarized in Chapter IV; and conference participant impact is reported in Chapter V.

Contents

I. Introduction

In recent years, there has been considerable effort to move school discipline away from over-reliance on suspensions and exclusionary discipline as a predominant response to student misbehavior. A growing body of research has found that exclusionary school discipline has negative effects on subsequent school behavior, academic achievement and graduation, and increased the likelihood of arrest and incarceration, which is often called the "school to prison pipeline" (Fabelo et al., 2011; Hirschfield, Marchbanks et al., 2014; Losen, 2014). In addition, research has consistently found that minority students are more likely to be suspended especially when suspension is discretionary (Fabelo et al., 2011; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002). In 2014, the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education (DOE), along with the U.S. Department of Justice, released guidance indicating that such disparate suspension would be considered a civil rights violation and investigated and/or prosecuted as such (U.S. DOE, 2014), although the DOE rescinded that guidance in 2017-18.

Many states and school districts have now mandated reductions in the use of suspension. For example, in 2016, 44 states changed laws to reform school discipline (Bezinque et al., 2016). Restorative justice (RJ) approaches are among the alternatives to exclusionary discipline that schools have been exploring. The current project concerns the implementation of one RJ intervention, RJ conferences, as implemented by the Youth Restoration Project in schools in Rhode Island.

Restorative Justice

The general philosophy of RJ is that the aim of responses to misbehavior should be to repair the harm from misbehavior; when that misbehavior includes direct victims, then repairing the harm generally requires involving the victim (e.g., Bazemore & Umbreit, 1995; Braithwaite, 1989; Zehr, 2002). Different models include victim-offender mediation, peer courts, and RJ conferences (Umbreit et al., 2016). In criminal justice contexts, RJ is often used as an optional diversion that is made available only when both offender and victim are willing to participate, and offenders must generally accept responsibility as a prelude to participation. RJ has been used with a variety of offenses ranging from sexual violence (Koss, 2014) to white-collar and civil contexts (Braithwaite, 1982).

RJ aims to achieve accountability for misbehavior but in a non-punitive way that supports repairing of relationships and making amends. This has been compared to "authoritative" parenting in Baumrind's (1966, 1991) parenting typology which includes both strong control/demands along with strong support, in contrast to "authoritarian" parenting which includes strong control/demands but little by way of support (Wachtel, 2016; Gregory et al., 2014).

One important difference between RJ and punishment-based approaches (often based on deterrence) is that RJ focuses on psychological aspects of compliance with the law that are *internal*, while punishment and deterrence focus on *external* motivation for compliance (Tyler, 2006). RJ focuses on harnessing the motivation of shame and on repairing relationships (e.g., "reintegrative shaming" for Braithwaite's, 2008) and social and community bonds (Karp & Breslin, 2001).

In the school context, too, the RJ philosophy focuses on relationships and on harnessing internal motivation for behavior, which stands in contrast to a philosophy based on using punishment and deterrence to harness external motivation for behavior. As in the CJ and JJ contexts, schools use a

variety of RJ models for responding to misbehavior, including victim-offender mediation, RJ conferences, and peer "courts." Many RJ experts believe that school-based RJ responses to particular misbehaviors – such as mediation or conferences – cannot be truly effective or sustainable unless they are implemented in a school with a restorative approach and that utilizes restorative practices (Guckenberg et al., 2015; Voight et al., 2013). Therefore, implementation of particular RJ interventions is often undertaken along with broader school-wide attempts to instill a restorative philosophy in the school. That is, particular RJ interventions are often implemented along with a broader attempt to change the school climate beyond responses to particular student misbehaviors, including changing patterns of communication between students and staff and among students. These are often referred to as "restorative practices" (RPs) which are less formal and may not be in response to misbehavior. A common element is to help students acknowledge their emotions in a safe space and for teachers, staff, and other students learns communication styles that are supportive and respectful. Restorative approaches are often also coupled with trauma-informed approaches which recognize that misbehavior may be rooted in student trauma and attempts to avoid re-traumatizing students.

Prior Evidence of Effectiveness

In the justice system, RJ approaches used as diversion alternatives show considerable promise, including evidence that participating victims find RJ processes more satisfying than traditional processes (Sherman and Strang, 2007), including juveniles (Wilson, Olaghere, and Kimbrell, 2017). There are also some promising reports for RJ in schools, although few of those studies are rigorous impact studies using RCTs or strong quasi-experimental designs (Fronius et al., 2019). A fair number of the studies have been reports of school-wide improvements in suspension or expulsion or in school climate.

For RJ conferences in schools, in particular, much of the evidence draws on pre-post results for participating students. For example, in Minnesota, McMorris et al. (2013) report that students who were identified for expulsion, but instead participated in a program of RJ family-group conferences, showed considerable improvement in attendance, readiness to graduate, and days suspended in the year following participation compared to the year of participation. However, this was largely followed by a return to the levels of the year preceding participation (p. 30- 32).

Augustine, et al. (2018) evaluated a RJ intervention from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) in schools in Pittsburgh, in a study involved random assignment of 44 schools. IIRP's intervention is a complex mix of restorative practices with eleven key components. Augustine et al. found significant reductions in suspensions and improvement in teacher perceptions of school climate, although student perceptions did not improve, along with complex results for more distal academic outcomes.

Despite considerable enthusiasm for RJ approaches, "to date, there is no clear evidence about its effectiveness" (Fronius et al. (2016). One important challenge is to implement RJ programs with fidelity, which is not easy "for schools used to dealing with conflict in a punitive way," as noted in a recent Campbell Collaborative review (Valdebenito et al., 2018, p. 97).

The RJ in Rhode Island Schools Multi-Level Intervention

The RJ intervention was implemented in seven schools in RI by the Youth Restoration Project (YRP). The RJ intervention was a multi-level intervention. At the whole-school level, YRP worked extensively with the participating schools on changing the schools' approach to responding to misbehavior to be

restorative, and more generally to changing the interaction style of teachers and other staff to be restorative. That whole-school effort provided the scaffolding for implementing individual-level RJ conferences in response to misbehavior.

The Intervention Context

The project was centered in the Central Falls School District in Rhode Island, which is a small, working class, majority Hispanic suburb of Providence. Central Falls' middle and high school (Calcutt Middle School and Central Falls High School) participated in all phases of the project. Central Falls is the most densely populated city in Rhode Island, with 19,328 people in 2014;[1] its school district serves about 2,500 students.[2] The median household income was $29,589 in 2015,[2] and 81 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced price lunch in school year 2015-16.[3]

YRP and the Central Falls School District had been working together for several years on restorative practices, focused on building partnerships among police, schools, social services, families, and communities through training and dialogue since 2008. This partnership culminated in the current project, in which RJ conferencing was provided by conference facilitators and implementation managers at YRP.[3]

Implementation began in fall 2014 in the middle and high schools in Central Falls, which were treated as the pilot schools for implementation. The 2015–16 school year was the first full school year of implementation. Starting in 2016-17, a middle and high school in Providence also participated (Bishop Middle School and Hope High School). These four schools are the focus of our ongoing individual-level impact evaluation.

Conference observations were also conducted in a participating charter high school, The Greene School. At these five schools, between 2015-16 and 2017-2018, 786 cases were referred for conferences ; conferences were held in about half of these cases (379).

Three additional schools participated early in the project (Blackstone Valley Preparatory School, and Westerly Middle and High Schools), and then dropped out. 56 additional cases were referred at these schools, and 41 conferences were held; none were observed.

By the time the project was launched, five of the participating schools had been trained in restorative practices by YRP or trainers using YRP's training techniques and materials. Some of the schools had already adopted some restorative language: One school district classified their behavior management staff as "restorative specialists," and another school had a "restorative dean."

At all participating schools, respondents reported that the approach to discipline had been much harsher and more punitive several years before the project. There were also reportedly many instances of students being arrested or referred to truancy court. The change in approach was particularly notable in Central Falls High School (CFHS), where the current project follows a considerable reform in behavior management policies and practices. CFHS had undergone a considerable transformation beginning in summer 2010. After being identified by the Rhode Island Department of Education as a persistently low-

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[1] City-Data on Central Falls, Rhode Island. http://www.city-data.com/city/Central-Falls-Rhode-Island.html.
[2] Infoworks!: Rhode Island Education Data Reporting on Central Falls District. Retrieved from: http://infoworks.ride.ri.gov/district/central-falls
[3] Although hired by YRP, facilitators are employees of Family Service of Rhode Island.

achieving school, CFHS adopted a turnaround plan, which included school culture and climate as one of its targets for improvement. The school transformation included a number of changes to behavior management at the school, including changes to and clarification of policies regarding behavior management, and it hired four restorative specialists to work with students outside the classroom (Burns and colleagues 2011). The number of behavioral referrals dropped dramatically from 2010–11 (8,209) to the following two years (3,043 and 3,815, respectively) (Burns, Shah, and Dure, 2013).

Schoolwide Restorative Practices

YRP's approach to implementing RJ can be described as including three levels (figure 1). The first level involves establishing a schoolwide RJ climate and integrating the restorative framework, language, and philosophy into the school. The focus is on communication; building strengths-based relationships among students, teachers, and staff; and creating a school culture that emphasizes students' relationships with their school communities. Restorative practices include a focus on language and communication. When discussing conflict, members of the school community are taught to use "I statements," affective statements that simply address how a person feels and perceives a situation without judgment or offering a solution. They are also taught to use questions that focus on affective responses, such as: Tell me what has been happening? What has not been working for you? What can we do to support you? (Wachtel 2009).

The second level involves using restorative practices to address relatively low-level behaviors, such as disrespect for teachers or disruption of the classroom or in the hallway. The restorative approach is focused on engaging students and working with them to discuss issues in an effort to quickly integrate them back into the classroom.

Restorative practices aim to de-escalate issues and facilitate communication and solutions. One restorative practice is the use of "walk and talks," in which school staff walk and talk with students about their misbehavior and related issues to get at the root of what is going on, how it can be remedied, and how students can reenter the class environment. This practice is used as a way to connect with students one-on-one in a safe space and handle behavior that is potentially disruptive to other students in the classroom.[4]

Another restorative practice is the dialogue circle, which "gives people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum, and equality" (Wachtel 2009, 7). Circles are used for myriad purposes, including general check-ins, support, and conflict resolution, all of which are focused on providing room for everyone to share their perspectives and build a supportive community. Restorative language and turn-taking (often using a "talking stick" to signal who has the floor) are key ingredients in dialogue circles. Circles can occur at the individual, classroom, school, or even community level.

RJ Conferences

The third level is using restorative conferences in response to serious misbehavior, to seek to repair harm and hold students accountable.

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[4] See Robert Rettmann and Patrice Vossekuil, "Enhancing Respectfulness through Restorative Practices," CPI, April 2012, http://www.crisisprevention.com/Blog/April-2012/Enhancing-Respectfulness-Through-Restorative-Pract.

The RJ conferences were family group conferences; students were referred for truancy, chronic disruption, and other misbehavior either involving direct victims (e.g., assault and theft) or without direct victims (e.g., fire alarm pulls and drug use). In the impact evaluation, the conferences are treated as the primary intervention.

Once students were referred to the RJ staff for conferencing, parents needed to be contacted; conferences could only be held if parents consented. Parental consent and student assent were required for participation in a RJ conference. While obtaining consent, an additional request for consent to observation was also included; most conference participants consented to observation.

Parent participation was encouraged, but occasionally conferences proceed even if parents or guardians were unable or unwilling to participate. If there were direct victims, they were contacted for participation; if victims were other students, parent participation was encouraged. (For victims below age 18, parental consent was also required.)

Conference facilitators conducted considerable pre-conference work before a conference was conducted. This included separate meetings (or phone conversations) with students and parents to understand their perspectives and ensure that they understood what a RJ conference entails and the guideline for conferences, described below. Facilitators also tried to work with families to understand whether there were family needs or issues that contributed to the student misbehavior. However, conference facilitators were not clinical staff; if clinical or therapeutic needs were uncovered, facilitators made referrals to appropriate services.

YRP's basic conference protocol began with an introduction of people and their roles, followed by the facilitator reviewing guidelines for a conference ("we ask questions; we take turns speaking; we use "I" statements, and we stick to the facts). Facilitators also noted that strong feelings are fine, normal, and even encouraged, but that aggression is not. The facilitators also reviewed the four basic questions that the conferences would discuss: What happened? Who was affected? What does the community need? and What will the student and community learn [from this experience]? Laminated copies of an overview of the conference process and of guidelines, and of the four basic questions, were brought to the conference and shared. These are shown in Appendix A.

Each question was discussed in a round robin, with any victim participants given the option of speaking first, then the student, and then other participants. Finally, the conference turned to create a restorative agreement (a.k.a. "action plan") to address the question: "How do we make it right?" Restorative agreements were intended to contain four elements; behavior change; amends and restitution; a learning experience; and community support for the student learning.

Conference Sample
Over three school years, from 2015-16 to 2017-2018, 842 referrals were made to conferences; about half involved middle school students and half high-school students. Around 75 conferences each were in response to chronic disruption, truancy, and for incidents involving a direct victim, while 193 cases were for other reasons, primarily discrete incidents without a direct victim (e.g., pulling fire alarm, carrying drugs in school). In the RJ approach, the reason for a conference is to repair harm and to repair relationships. Even cases without "direct victims" may involve harm to the school community at large, to teachers, perhaps to classmates and even to family. Especially in cases of chronic disruption, teachers

often feel harmed by the misbehavior. Thus, school staff often participated in conferences partly in order to represent the community that had been harmed.

Conferences were observed in 5 schools (see chapter IV). In in these schools 786 cases were referred for conferences; of which conferences were held in about half of these cases (379), as shown in Exhibit 1. Conference scheduling often needed adjustment, with parent work schedules an important factor; especially when schedules were changed, in many cases observers were not available. On average, observed conferences were held 39 days after the referral.

Exhibit 1. Reasons for Conferences.

	All	Schools			Observed	Schools			
Reason for Conference	Referrals to Conference		Conferences Held		Referrals to Conference		Conferences Held		Observed Conferences	
Truancy	150	18%	81	19%	127	16%	67	18%	19	18%
Chronic Disruption	144	17%	71	17%	137	17%	66	17%	23	22%
Direct Victim Incidents	146	17%	75	18%	140	18%	69	18%	24	23%
Other Incidents	402	48%	193	16%	372	49%	177	47%	39	37%
TOTAL	842	100%	420	100%	786	100%	379	100%	105	100%

Note: The numbers for referrals and conferences held are based on YRP data, while the number of observed conferences is based on observation data.

Most observed conferences had 2 facilitators (83 of 105, or 79%). The median number of participants in a conference was 4, with a range of 1 to 14. Direct victims participated in only 14 of these conferences, and their supporters participated in only 4 of the observed conferences.

The observed RJ conferences involved both middle school (n=51) and high-school (n=54) students; 15 conferences involved multiple misbehaving students, especially in response to bullying. In all but 6 observed conferences, parents or guardians participated; 15 observed conferences also involved other supporters of the misbehaving student.

II. First Year Implementation Findings

Liberman and Katz (2017) reported on the first full year of implementation. That report is available at https://www.urban.org/research/publication/implementing-restorative-justice-rhode-island-schools.

The report finds that restorative conferencing requires a consistent referral process, which in turn depends on buy-in and support from school administrators, disciplinary staff, and teachers. Pre-conference work and post-conference follow-up maximize the effectiveness of restorative agreements reached in conference. Successful family group conferencing addresses deeper causes of misbehavior, helps students understand their actions, repairs harm, and develops supportive relationships.

Common Challenges with Conferences Noted in the Implementation Report

Respondents noted that the most difficult conferences were those that involved difficult family relationships or very sensitive information. For example, in some cases, there were deeper issues like separation, disconnection, or parent's lack of control of students. In these cases, emotions often ran high and there were deeper family dynamics to work through, which sometimes led to challenges connecting the issues back to the incident at hand to successfully reach a resolution.

Another challenge encountered in conferences was when students shared some sensitive information in preconference (e.g., drug or alcohol use, or sexual experience) that their parent or guardian did not know about. Usually this piece of information was crucial to understanding the student's background or the incident itself. Facilitators who encountered this challenge often worked with students during the preconference to help them feel more comfortable in a supportive environment like conferences.

While staff had challenges connecting with parents to set up conferences, there were also challenges that arose during the conferences. Respondents noted that in some conferences, parents or guardians spoke over their children and did not adhere to the rules of allowing everyone an opportunity to talk. In other cases, parents would not accept that their child did anything wrong, or they were defiant about the school's authority and told their child not to listen to the assistant principal or principal.

Some respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that all conference participants are attentive (without using cell phones or other distractions) and that all participants remain in the conference for the whole time, rather than coming and going.

Key Elements of Successful Conferences

In discussing the features of successful conferences, respondents highlighted the importance of identifying and addressing deeper causes of the problem, helping students understand the impact of their actions, setting up meaningful restitution that helped benefit the student and school or wider community, and developing or rejuvenating a supportive relationship.

Focusing on the support element, respondents mentioned cases in which families were confronting deeper issues (e.g., housing or employment) that were relatively unknown but came out during the conference process. In these cases, families were often referred to the Family Care Community Partnership, including Family Service of Rhode Island, which partners with a number of agencies to connect families with a wide variety of help, including case management and social service benefits. At other times, learning about the family context and issues uncovered problems that were easier to address, such as Internet connectivity issues.

Respondents emphasized cases in which there was a breakthrough in helping students understand the impact of their actions. For example, in a few cases, offending students were able to hear firsthand the impact of their actions on the victims who participated in their conference. In other scenarios, students heard from school staff, parents, or other community members about how their actions directly affected a person or the community in a negative way. Respondents noted the power of this experience, as students typically do not have the opportunity to understand the impact of their actions and confront those affected under a traditional discipline approach.

Respondents highlighted that successful conferences also helped students to develop or rejuvenate new supportive relationships. In some instances, this included improving the relationship between parent and child. Others noted that the process provided the student with a relationship with the facilitator or a school staff member with whom they felt comfortable working and meeting. Some respondents also noted the benefit of the participation and attendance of multiple school actors at conferences.

III. Teacher Perspectives

How do teachers feel about restorative practices (RP) and restorative justice conferences (RJC)? Teachers are critical for the successful implementation of restorative practices in schools. They not only have the most interactions with students daily, but they also are the conduits between administrators and students. In this role, teachers are often asked to alter their strategies or approach in key areas including behavior management and improving school climate. While teacher support for RP and RJC has not been studied extensively, reports do seem to be generally positive. The current project attempted to explore this issue through surveys and focus groups. The method and findings for the teacher survey and focus groups are presented in detail in Appendix A.

Teacher Survey and Focus Groups

Teacher surveys were conducted in four participating schools, both to assess teacher perceptions of overall school climate, as well as attitudes toward RP and RJCs. For climate questions, we first reviewed past surveys in Rhode Island focused on school climate. In the 2013-2014 school year all project schools participated in a school climate survey. However, this survey was discontinued after 2014. Rhode Island has a new school climate survey that was first launched in the 2017-2018 school year; it includes less of a focus on teachers' perspectives on school discipline and school environment than previously.

Two waves of the teacher surveys were conducted, the first in May 2017 and the second in March-April, 2018. One-hour teacher focus groups were held at the four project schools in Spring and Fall 2018. Six focus groups were held, with 30 school staff participants. Focus group protocols were primarily based on the year 1 teacher survey and information gathered on our five implementation site visits during the first 18 months of the project.

Findings

School climate and discipline were rated moderately, with the lowest agreement that school discipline was effective. Among those teachers trained in RJ, there was moderate endorsement that they understood RP, and had used RPs, and supported future use of RPs, but somewhat lower perceptions of the effectiveness of *conferences*. Support for future use of RPs was also significantly correlated with the most other measures, as was perceived conference effectiveness, which suggests that more exposure to RPs was associated with more positive views.

The focus groups and open-ended survey questions demonstrate that teachers valued restorative practices and a more thoughtful approach to communicating with students and solving problems. These results are largely consistent with the quantitative survey results, which showed moderate teacher support for RPs, albeit somewhat less support for RJ conferences *per se.* In addition*,* that support increased over time, presumably due to more experience with the school's use of RPs and with YRP staff involvement at the schools.

However, in focus groups and open-ended survey items, teachers did raise key concerns around implementation, which included buy in, consistency, shifting school culture, and leadership vision. Despite this, most teachers wanted their schools to continue using restorative practices.

IV. Fidelity of Conference Implementation

Trained observers completed ratings of conferences immediately following the conference, to assess fidelity to the conference protocol. Conferences were observed in 5 schools. In in these schools 786 cases were referred for conferences; of which conferences were held in about half of these cases (379). Conference scheduling often needed adjustment, with parent work schedules an important factor; especially when schedules were changed, in many cases observers were not available. On average, observed conferences were held 39 days after the referral.

Exhibit 1 in Chapter I shows the reasons for observed conferences. About half of the conferences were for incidents without direct victims (e.g., alarm pulls, carrying drugs in school); the other conferences were distributed among responses to chronic disruption, truancy, and incidents involving a direct victim. In the RJ approach, the reason for a conference is to repair harm and to repair relationships. Even cases without "direct victims" may involve harm to the school community at large, to teachers, perhaps to classmates and even to family. Especially in cases of chronic disruption, teachers often feel harmed by the misbehavior. Thus, school staff often participated in conferences partly in order to represent the community that had been harmed.

Observation results are described in greater detail in a journal manuscript that is currently under review.

Conference Observations

Observation rating were made on tablet computers programmed with Qualtrics software. Upon connection to the internet, these were automatically uploaded to Qualtrics secure servers, accessible only to UI researchers, and then automatically deleted from the tablet.[5]

The observational instrument drew heavily on items from two prior studies. Hipple, Gruenwald, and McGarrell (2015) developed an observational measure for family group conferencing in the court context for violent and non-violent incidents involving victims. Mazerolle, Bennett, and Eggins (2011; Mazerolle, 2014) developed an observational measure of fidelity for Project Ability, which involved diversion conferences in response to truancy in Australia. Conferences were led by law enforcement officers and stressed the legal levers that might be brought to bear on the student and guardians for continued truancy.

Our measure included 53 items, some of which concerned student family and supporters, and 14 of which concerned victims and/or their supporters. We limit our report to items that applied to all conferences. Observers also recorded who contributed to the action plan that was agreed to at the end of the conference.

The observed RJ conferences involved both middle school (n=51) and high-school (n=54) students; 15 conferences involved multiple misbehaving students, especially in response to bullying. Most observed conferences had 2 facilitators (83 of 105, or 79%). In all but 6 observed conferences, parents or guardians participated; 15 observed conferences also involved other supporters of the misbehaving student. The median number of participants in a conference was 4, with a range of 1 to 14. Direct

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[5] Occasional technical problem led to incomplete observations for several additional cases which are not included in the present sample.

victims participated in only 14 of these conferences, and their supporters participated in only 4 of the observed conferences.

Results

Basic results are shown in Exhibit 2, and are organized around facilitator behavior, conference interactions, student responses, and conference outputs.

Exhibit 2. Conference Observation Results.

	Items	N	Mean (scale 0 – 3)	SD
FACILITATOR BEHAVIOR				
Facilitator Introduction	4	104	0.94*	0.13
Facilitator Management	4	105	2.79	0.34
CONFFERENCE INTERACTIONS				
Participant Interactions	4	105	2.89	0.30
Blame Focused (reversed)	1	105	2.86	0.47
Emphasis on consequences	2	105	2.01	1.12
STUDENT RESPONSE				
Remorse	3	105	1.75	0.92
Student Cried	1	105	0.27	0.78
Student Disengaged (reversed)	1	84	2.56	0.80
CONFERENCE OUTPUTS				
Group Forgiveness	1	98	2.15	1.12
Consensus on Action Plan	1	105	2.91	0.41
Problem Interactions (reversed)	2	97	2.80	0.45
Made Matters Worse (reversed)	1	105	2.95	0.35
CONTRIBUTORS TO ACTION PLAN				
School or Agency Representatives	1	103	2.84	0.62
Students	1	105	2.37	0.85
Parents or student supporters	1	99	2.24	1.06

Note: Higher scores indicate more positive implementation for all items. All items and indices were on a 0 to 3 scale, with maximum scores of 3.00, except where noted.

* Facilitator introduction consisted of binary items and had a maximum score of 1.00.

Conference facilitators showed extremely high fidelity to implementing the RJ conference as intended, and conference participants largely interacted in a manner consistent with the conference protocol, treating each other respectfully, and emphasizing the consequences of continued misbehavior without focusing on blame. Student behavior during the conferences was somewhat less positive; while students did not act disengaged, their expressions of remorse were only moderate. Conference outputs were mixed. Few conferences had problematic interactions, almost none were seen by observers as making matters worse, and there was high consensus on the action plans. Yet, the extent to which groups offered forgiveness to the students was only moderate.

To what degree do the conference inputs from facilitators and other participants predict student responses? And to what degree do those predict conference outputs? Ironically, the high fidelity ratings means that there is relatively little variation in fidelity with which to predict student behavior. We

examined correlations among the four items with average ratings below 2.79: consequences, remorse, disengagement, and forgiveness, as well as the degree to which students and parents contributed to development of the action plan. Emphasizing consequences was associated with more student expression of remorse (r =+.19, I = .06) but also with more student disengagement (r =−.20, p= .06, with item reversed). Both student behaviors in turn were positively associated with the group seeming to forgive the student (rs = .38 and .24, respectively). This pattern of results seems to reflect the tension that is associated with accountability and emphasis on consequences. They can both increase expressions of student remorse and lead to forgiveness but they can also increase disengagement and undermine forgiveness. Student remorse and disengagement (reversed) were also associated with students and their parents contributing to development of the action plan.

However, we note that conferences are dynamic, and all these measures summarize behavior throughout the conference, so that we cannot be sure of what preceded what. For example, early expressions of possible forgiveness by the group may have preceded and prompted expressions of remorse by students as much as the reverse.

In summary, we find that the conferences were largely implemented with fidelity, and that conferences were successful in reaching consensus in action plans. Facilitator ratings were so uniformly high that there was too little variability to allow us to see whether less consistent implementation would be associated with different student behavior or other conference outputs. Those high fidelity ratings also mean that there was little room for variation by the reason for the conference, whether chronic absenteeism, truancy, or incidents with or without direct victims.

That conference facilitators and interactions were so successful in implementation also speaks to the effectiveness of the pre-conference work done by conference facilitators, so that all participants understood the RJ conference ground rules. At the same time, this also may reflect selection by facilitators, who did not bring cases to conference until and unless they were confident that participants were ready to participate effectively. This may be one reason for the relatively long time to conference. And perhaps these very high fidelity ratings also indicate that facilitators were too conservative in bringing cases to conference.

Conferences were moderately successful in harnessing emotions as would be hoped, that is, in producing remorse among misbehaving students and forgiveness from the other participants. That conferences did not always produce remorse among misbehaving students and forgiveness from other participants should not be surprising; RJ conferences are not magic bullets and sometimes relationships have been seriously fractured. Finally, we found little difference in ratings among conferences of different types.

V. Impact of RJ Conference Participation

We hypothesized that student participation in RJ conferences would lead to reduced misbehavior for participating students, in the year after conference participation, compared to similar students who had not participated.

To test the impact of participating in RJ conferences on students, we used propensity-score matching (PSM) to identify a comparison group of students from the same schools who did not participate in RJ conferences but whose misbehavior might plausibly had led to such participation.[6]

Method

Sample

The impact study was limited to middle or high school students who participated in a conference during three school years (SYs 2015-16, 16-17, and 17-18) in four participating schools: the middle and high schools Central Falls (Central Falls High School and Calcutt Middle School) and a middle and high school in Providence (Bishop Middle School and Hope High School). The analytic sample included 271 students[7] with full school data, including Rhode Island Department of Education enrollment information with good identifiers, and who participated in RJ conferences prior to their senior year so that disciplinary responses in the following year could be examined.

Propensity Score Matching

Conferenced students were matched with comparison students from within the participating schools who had had a referral, suspension, or more than 5 unexcused absences during a potential conference year and might plausibly have been conferenced. Matching was done within grade, across the three years of conferencing. To do this, a separate record was created for each eligible non-conferenced student in each program year, so that up to 3 records were created for a comparison student, and these were used in within-grade matching. For example, a student in 6th grade in 2015-16, 7th grade in 2016-17, and 8th grade in 2017-18 was a potential match to students conferenced in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades during any of the three years of conferencing.

Propensity scores (PSs) were then estimated separately for MS and HS students, using stepwise logistic regression. These PSs were then used to do propensity score matching (PSM) separately within each grade, using nearest neighbor matching with replacement, within calipers (0.25), and with variable matching up to 3 matches. This was implemented using the MatchIt package in R. The matched students were then combined across grades for analysis; 251 conferenced students were successfully matched and 20 were unmatched.

To ensure that the temporal order was consistent, matching variables were either based on childhood data or data from the two years preceding the conferenced year (or potential conference year for comparison students), and outcomes were assessed only in future semesters.

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[6] Our original design had been to use a 2-step matching process which first involved finding matched schools, and then use propensity score matching to identify matched students. Best comparison schools would be identified on the basis of suspension rates, student demographics, school size, and school achievement. However, we found that suspension rates were not stable across the 3 years of the program, so that we were unable to effectively match schools.

[7] If a student had participated in more than one RJ conference, only their first conference was used.

Matching variables based on data from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) included demographics (sex, black, Hispanic), English language-learner (ELL), Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and free or reduced price lunch. Variables concerning responses to misbehavior were included both for the year immediately preceding the conference, and for the year before that: any OSS, chronic absenteeism (absent 10% of school days), any referrals for six type of infractions (violent, property, substance use, interpersonal, attendance, and disaffection) as well as the variety (a count) among those types of infractions. PSs were created separately for MS and HS students, and in-school suspension (ISS) was included for MS students.

Additional matching variable were linked from the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH).[8] These included 3 RIDOH calculated risk variables for the child at birth based on parental demographics, child risk, and maternal risk (algorithms unavailable), as well as mothers' age (grouped as 18 or under, 19-24, and 25 or over), marital status , education level, and number of prior births.

To deal with missing data, for students missing all health data, a missing values flag was included and means were substituted. For other variables, single imputation was implemented using the Mice (multiple imputations using chained equations) package in R.

The conference sample differed considerably from the comparison pool on many of the included covariates, especially those that described prior school misbehavior, namely in-school suspension (ISS) out-of-school suspension (OSS), recorded infractions, and absenteeism. For HS students, 2 variables remained unbalanced, with significant differences on the probability of an attendance infraction in the year preceding the conference, on the probability of a property infraction in second year preceding the conference. For MS students, on variable remained unbalanced a significant difference remained in the whether the mother was married at the time of the child's birth. These variables were included as covariates in regression models.

Outcomes

The impact of conference participation was examined on OSS and variety of infractions over the next year – meaning the next two semesters – following participation in the RJ conference. For students conferenced in the Fall, the follow-up year began with the Spring semester, and for students conferenced in the Spring semester, follow-up began in the following Fall. Outcome data was obtained from Outcome data Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) during Spring 2019, before data were yet available for SY 2018-2019. Fall 2018 semester infraction and OSS data were obtained directly from the participating school districts, Central Falls Public Schools and the Providence Public School District.

Infraction and OSS data were also examined over just one-semester of follow up; no results were significant and they are not presented here.

Chronic absenteeism (CA; absent 10% of school days) was also analyzed, but with a considerably smaller sample. CA is calculated at the school-year level, so that the first possible follow-up period is the next school year, beginning in the Fall, regardless of whether a student had participated in an RJ conference in the Fall or Spring semester. CA data could not be obtained before the entire year was complete, and

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[8] RIDOH data was linked by Data Spark at the University of Rhode Island, which serves as a data hub for considerable RI data. The data sharing agreement allowed Data Spark to use those health variables only to create propensity scores (PS), after which the PSs could be shared with the Urban Institute, and also deidentified, but not the underlying health variables themselves.

the last available year for which CA data was available was SY 2017-18. Therefore, RJ conferences in SY 2017-18 were excluded, and analyses were limited to conferences in SY 2015-16 and SY 2016-17.

Several other intended outcomes could not be examined. First, there was almost no recorded use of ISS in HS over the course of the project. In addition, policy mandates were reducing the recorded use of ISS in MS, making the measure unstable over time and possibly unreliable. Second, standardized tests results for reading and math achievement were intended outcomes, but standardized tests were changed midway through the project, so that we were unable to combine data across years. (Test results were not comparable, even using norms established for each test for proficiency.) Finally, data sharing agreements had been executed to allow examination of new charged being filed in family court, but these data were not received.

Results

To assess the impact of conference participation on outcomes, regressions were run on the matched samples. For the variety of infractions, this was an OLS model, and for OSS and chronic absenteeism, these were logit models. All models weighted the comparison observations as the inverse of the number of matches to each treatment case, so that with 3 comparison cases, each was weighted at 1/3; 2 matches were each weighted 1/2.[9]

The following covariates were included: each outcome's premeasure for the year before conference participation, the propensity scores, HS (vs. MS) at the time of the conference, and whether the conference took place in the Fall or Spring semesters,[10] and dummy variables interacting the school district and school year. In addition, covariates that remained unbalanced after PSM were included as covariates.

Data were analyzed separately by school level, and also for the entire sample with a dummy for school level (mS vs. HS) and an interaction term for school level; results were equivalent. One-year outcomes (unweighted means) are shown in Exhibit 3, along with significance levels of separate models for middle and high school students. Conference participation was associated with a significantly greater variety of referrals and more OSS suspension over the next year, especially among middle school students. These detrimental effects of conferences were significantly larger for middle-schoolers, with statistically significant conference x school-level interactions in omnibus models.

Conference participants had slightly lower rates of CA in HS but slightly higher rates in MS; neither the omnibus effect nor the interaction with school level was at all significant.

Exhibit 3: One-year post-conference outcomes by school level.

ONE YEAR OUTCOMES						
	Comparison Students		Conferenced Students			Model
	N	Mean	N	Mean	diff	Coefficients

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[9] Models were run with and without controlling for clustering, and were essentially identical.

[10] Most conferences happened in the Spring semester, and so comparison students' potential conferences were set to the Spring semester, and follow-up time began in the following Fall.

MS	Variety of infractions	493	0.41	166	0.76	0.36	0.19	*
	OSS	493	0.19	166	0.42	0.23	0.93	***
	Chronic Absenteeism ‡	112	0.52	80	0.54	0.02	--	
HS	Variety of infractions	239	0.23	85	0.36	0.12	0.06	
	OSS	239	0.16	85	0.26	0.08	0.29	
	Chronic Absenteeism ‡	64	0.61	50	0.56	-0.05	--	

Note: Infractions were modeled in OLS; OSS was modeled as logit.
*: p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.
‡ Next School Year

In sum, we fail to find evidence for the hypothesized beneficial effect of RJ conference participation on subsequent school misbehavior. Rather, in the two semesters after conference participation, students who had participated as middle schoolers received a greater variety of disciplinary referrals, and were more liked to be suspended than a comparison group of matched peers.

What explains these results? We consider three possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive. First despite considerable efforts to match conferences students to comparable students from their schools, conferenced students may nonetheless have been selected in a way that was associated with greater risk of further disciplinary action. As discussed below, our process evaluation provides reason to be concerned about this possibility, given the considerable discretion that was present during the process for referring cases to RJ conferences and how that may have been used. Second, it may be that participating in RJ conferences somehow undermined the message of responsibility for participating youth and undermined the deterrent effects of traditional sanctions. Finally, if school administrators and other staff treated the RJ conferences as a "last chance" for misbehaving students, they may then have been more likely to initiate formal sanctions afterwards for continued misbehavior.

These possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Our process evaluation indicated suggested that the referral process contained elements of the first process, namely, that some of the school staff were more likely to refer cases specifically of students showing chronic low-level misbehavior, after they believed other options had been exhausted. We do not have any indications that would either suggest or refute the other possibilities.

VI. Discussion

The RJ in RI project attempted to implement an ambitious combination of whole school restorative practices and individual-student RJ conferences. As is well recognized, changing the culture of a school toward a restorative approach to student behavior is a long-term endeavor that is often believed to take 3 to 5 years. Many implementation issues discussed in our first year implementation report have continued to be challenging throughout the program. Teachers also raised many of these issues in focus groups and surveys.

Restorative Practices

Overall, teachers valued restorative practices and a more thoughtful approach to communicating with students and solving problems. Quantitative survey results showed moderate teacher support for RPs, and somewhat less support for RJ conferences *per se.* That support increased over time, presumably due to more experience with the school's use of RPs and with YRP staff involvement at the schools. We suspect that one important reason that support for RPs does not always translate to support for RJ conferences is doubt that conferences can effectively serve the goal of accountability; this is less of a concern with RPs.

Implementing RJ Conferences with Fidelity

As part of the current project, conferences were observed and rated on fidelity, using an observation protocol developed. Conference observations indicated that they were implemented with fidelity to the conference protocol for the project. We also found little difference among observer ratings of conferences that were held for differing reasons. So few conferences broke down to suggest that perhaps facilitators were too conservative in ending preconference work and bringing cases to conference. We did find some that an emphasis on consequences (for continued misbehavior) was associated with both more remorse and more student defiance, with the former promoting forgiveness and the latter impeding it, which highlights the difficult balance that RJ conferences must achieve.

In addition, YRP's administrative data on cases that were conferenced indicate that the restorative agreement was completed in 74% of cases, partially completed in another 16% of cases, and not completed in 10% of cases.

The Larger Conferencing Process

RJ conferences are situated in a larger conferencing process, which also involves establishing a regular, consistent, and well-implemented referral process for which cases will be sent by school staff to restorative conferences, as well as an effective pre-conference process, including contacting parents and students for participation and timely initiation of conferences.

The referral process remained a challenge throughout the project. Over the course of the project, schools did not settle on formalized rules for referrals to RJ conferences, and teachers, administrators, and other school staff retained considerable discretion over which cases were referred to RJ conferences. The conference referral process was a continual renegotiation between YRP and the principals and administrators, which was set back after serious or high-profile school incidents, and following turnover in key positions such as school administrator. There was at times considerable reluctance on the part of some school staff to send the most appropriate cases to RJ conferences. Research staff anecdotally heard from conference facilitators that chronically misbehaving students were sometimes being referred to conferences as a last resort, with the goal of "fixing" the student.

Because conferences are a short-term intervention, reserving them for students with chronic issues can easily lead to a mismatch between the problem and the intervention. (When such conference referrals were not triggered by appropriate incidents, RJ staff sometimes deemed such referrals inappropriate and did not accept them for RJ conferences.) This process may have led to selection of cases of youth who were particularly likely to continue to engage in misbehavior, in ways that were easily not captured by administrative data on prior misbehavior.

Moreover, especially with more serious misbehavior, administrators often did not feel that they could wait to respond until a conference could be scheduled. In many cases, schools responded promptly with immediate one-day suspensions, which preceded attempts to initiate preconference work; because students were often required to return to school with parents, one of the more successful ways for conference staff to initially reach parents was at "reentry." The consent process, especially with many working parents being difficult to reach, followed by a preconference process of meeting with all parties separately, also tends to lead to delays before conferences are held; on average conferences were held a month after the incident.

The preconference process was also not highly formalized in a way that would make it amenable to fidelity assessment. Once referred, about half of cases reached a conference.

Impact of RJ Conference Participation

To test the hypothesis that participation in RJ conferences would reduce subsequent misbehavior as evident by fewer referrals, suspensions, and chronic absenteeism in the year following the conference, we used a propensity score matching design, in which conferenced students were matched to similar students in the same set of schools. We failed to find any evidence to confirm those hypotheses, and in fact MS participants in RJ conferences experienced more disciplinary responses in the following year than did comparison students. These results may be due to three quite different processes, which are not mutually exclusive. First, conferences may have had detrimental effects on student participants, perhaps by undermining the deterrence or leading to a mixed message about behavioral expectations and consequences. Second, school staff who see RJ conferences as a "last chance" to repair misbehavior may afterwards have been stricter in responding to misbehavior, leading to more formal referrals and more OSS. Third, unfortunately, we are unable to rule out the possibility of a selection artifact, despite considerable efforts to match students using propensity scores. In the face of a conference referral process with considerable discretion, often on the part of staff with only partial buy-in to RJ conferences as a credible response, we heard anecdotal reports that conferences were being used as a last resort to "fix" chronically misbehaving students. Our attempt to match students may have been unable to control for such a selection and referral process.

Conclusion

RJ conferencing in schools has received considerable attention as a possible alternative to traditional punitive responses to student misbehavior. Implementing RJ conferencing requires a multi-year effort, and many experts believe that it cannot be effective unless implemented along with broader implementation of school-wide restorative practices. The current project suggests that implementing RPs at the whole school level is promising and can generate fairly wide support. This seems necessary but not sufficient for effectively implementing an RJ conference process. The current project does demonstrate how one may measure implementing of RJ conferences themselves with fidelity.

However, we find that the conferences themselves are only one part of an effective conferencing process. Such a process also requires a strong and consistently implemented referral process. This seems to require a strong agreement regarding details of the referral process, who has discretion, and a shared and clear understanding of which cases are most appropriate. That in turn, requires strong buy-in among key stakeholders about how RJ conferences can achieve some measure of accountability. All of this can be seriously impeded by turnover among principals and administrators. When those agreements cannot be reached and cemented, the RJ conference process will likely be implemented unevenly and – especially because conferences are not in public view – will be hard-pressed to themselves generate strong support. In such an implementation context, the chances that the RJ conferences themselves will produce the intended benefits are considerably reduced. In the current project, no benefit was observed for conference participation lowering disciplinary incidents in the following year, and MS conference participants actually showed worse behavioral outcomes than comparison students. In addition, lack of consistent buy-in coupled with loose referral procedures may have led students to be selected for RJ conferences based on chronic issues that are poorly suited to the relatively short-term nature of the RJ conference intervention. In turn, such non-formalized selection processes also lead to questions about make it difficult to confidently establish strong comparison groups.

In sum, the current project is one of relatively few to attempt to test the hypothesized benefits of responding to student misbehavior through RJ conferences (as distinguished from "circles" or "pro-active" conferences) on future student misbehavior. The project finds that fidelity in the conferences themselves is insufficient for effective implementation to the level that would allow strong tests of the hypothesized benefits of RJ conferencing. Rather the current project demonstrates the need for considerable development of formalized processes at other key steps of the conferencing process, especially standardized referral and selection criteria and processes, in order to set the stage for strong tests of the impact of school-based RJ conferences to address student misbehavior.

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Appendix A: Conference Protocol

Figure 1: Restorative Conference Protocol

Restorative Practices: School Safety, Accountability and Learning
Conferencing, Meeting, Re-Entry Process

RESTORATIVE AGREEMENT

PRE-CONFERENCE

Introduction

Introductions of the people in the room and their roles

Guidelines

Introduction to conferencing method and guidelines to ensure everyone has a voice

What do stakeholders want?

Victim?
Student?

Community?
Educator?
Parents?

What happened?

Who was affected?

What does the community need?

What will the student and community learn?

How do we make it right?

Restitution Agreement

What behavior change?

What amends, restitution?

What learning experience?

How does the community support the student learning?

FOLLOW-UP

Figure 2: Conference Guidelines

Restorative Practices
Community, Safety, Accountability and Learning

We agree:

WE ASK QUESTIONS

Ask questions to understand or clarify
Listen patiently for answers

WE TAKE TURNS SPEAKING

Each person gets heard
Do not interrupt, wait your turn
Listen to each person

WE USE "I" STATEMENTS

Speak about what you saw; you felt
Speak about what you did or want to do
Avoid "you" statements that accuse

"I feel..."
"I want..."
"I saw..."

WE STICK TO THE FACTS

Tell YOUR story of what happened
Refer to the behavior not the person
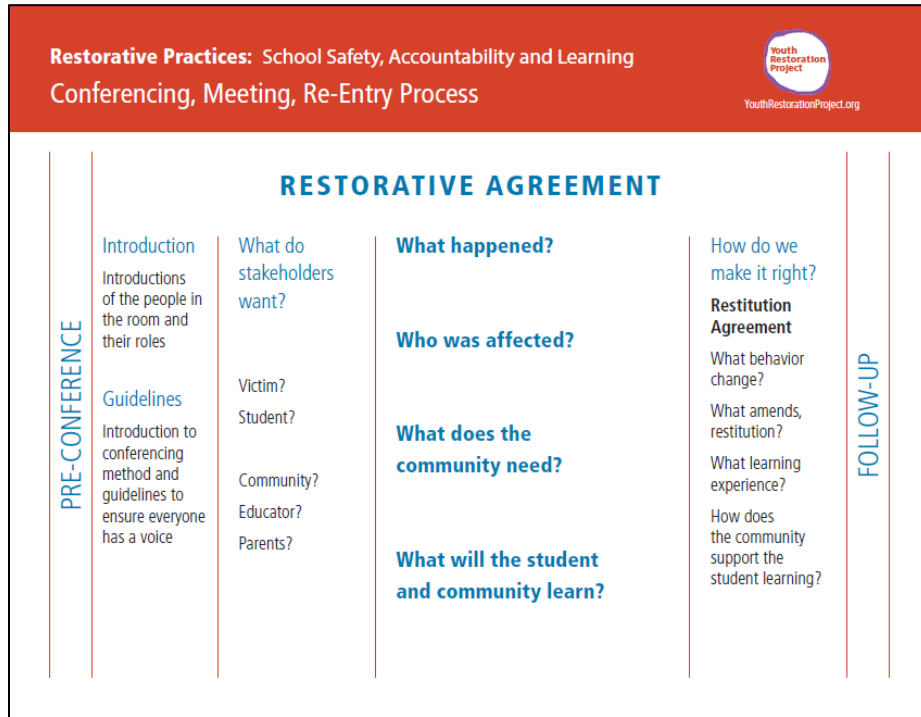
Teachers Perspective on Restorative Practices Implementation

Michael Katz

Introduction

How do teachers feel about restorative practices (RP) and restorative justice conferences (RJC)? Teachers are critical for the successful implementation of restorative practices in schools. They not only have the most interactions with students daily, but they also are the conduits between administrators and students. In this role, teachers are often asked to alter their strategies or approach in key areas including behavior management and improving school climate.

While teacher support for RP and RJC has not been studied extensively, reports do seem to be generally positive. In a Denver study (Anyon, 2016), a comprehensive training plan that included differentiated training, booster training, individual consultation and coaching, and scenarios and role playing, was seen as effective in supporting strong implementation. This translated into staff satisfaction and buy in. In Oakland (Jain et al., 2014), teacher surveys and focus groups showed that limited training and capacity was a primary challenge of implementation. In Pittsburgh (Augustine, et al. 2018), restorative staff provided multiple layers of training via mandatory 2-day training, monthly calls, professional learning groups, and coach visits. Overall, they found that training activities helped them better understand and use restorative practices. Although there were some challenges with the frequency of trainings.

Teacher reports have also identified several important challenges to RP implementation. One challenge that has been reported is lack of time for training and implementation. A study in Minneapolis (McMorris et al., 2013) in the mid-1990's highlighted that lack of time was a major obstacle to RP implementation. In Pittsburgh and Oakland, too, staff surveys showed that lack of time was the greatest barrier. Focus group data from Pittsburgh also highlight that specifically lack of time to be trained, use RP tools, engage parents and families, and ensure consistent commitment are problematic. Student attitudes are another challenge to implementing RP that has been commonly reported by teachers. In Pittsburgh, almost half of the teachers reported this, and student attitudes were one of the top five challenges cited by teachers in Oakland. Another commonly reported challenge is lack of clarity and consistency on how RPs are used, which was reported as a major barrier in Oakland and Pittsburgh, and similar to findings in Minneapolis. Finally, we note that each of these studies highlighted the long process of implementing a restorative practices approach, and that more time increases buy in and adoption. The Pittsburgh study was the first to systematically look at changes over time in teacher's actions and perceptions of restorative practices.   In this study, researchers found that teachers'

confidence in understanding and using restorative practices and their use of impromptu conference elements grew over time (between Year 1 and Year 2).

To our knowledge, no prior study has specifically examined teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward RJC in schools. Here we use a survey of teachers and focus groups with teachers to examine the perceptions of teachers in the schools participating in the YRP RJC project in Rhode Island.

Teacher Survey

Teacher surveys were conducted in four participating schools, both to assess teacher perceptions of overall school climate, as well as attitudes toward RP and RJCs. For climate questions, we first reviewed past surveys in Rhode Island focused on school climate. In the 2013-2014 school year, all project schools participated in a school climate survey. However, this survey was discontinued after 2014. Rhode Island has a new school climate survey that was first launched in the 2017-2018 school year; it includes less concerning teachers' perspectives on school discipline and school environment than in the previous survey. We also examined an NYC school survey, which has been administered since 2007 and is well respected in the field. Neither the Rhode Island nor the NYC school surveys focused on school discipline, school climate, and restorative practices.

Two waves of the teacher survey were conducted, the first in May 2017 and the second in March-April 2018. The survey was administered through Qualtrics survey software. Principals at participating schools were sent survey links and instructions to distribute to teachers. At most schools, principals set aside professional development or meeting time for survey administration. Teachers were also able to access the survey at any time during the survey window. Qualtrics data shows that the survey took an average of 6 minutes and 30 seconds to complete.

The sample for the survey was 140 teachers in four schools in 2017 and 122 teachers in 2018. The response rate was 73% for year one and 64% for year two.[11]

Teacher Survey Instrument

The final survey instrument had a maximum of 34 questions dependent on skip logic. There were 26 statements to which teachers agreed or disagreed on a four-point scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, scored from 1 to 4), 4 yes/no questions, and 4 open response questions.

The survey was structured to start at a broad level about school climate and discipline and to then ask more about restorative practices and conferences. Items were combined into six indices. The sample for each index differs based on the skip logic in each section and missingness. Pairwise deletion was used to limit missingness.

The *School Climate* index is comprised of 5 questions:

- The school is a safe place for students
- I feel safe at my school
- The school environment is conducive to learning
- Students treat teachers and staff with respect

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[11] A fifth school participated in the first wave, but only two teachers responded in the second wave. To allow comparison between waves, responses from that school are not included here.

- Staff and students treat each other as belonging to one community

The *School Discipline* index is comprised of 9 questions focused on the consistency, equitability, and effectiveness of the school discipline approach:

- Discipline policies and practices at this school are effective
- Discipline at this school is equitable
- Discipline strategies at this school are consistent
- Responses to truancy at this school are effective
- Responses to truancy at this school are consistent
- Responses to chronic disruption at this school are effective
- Responses to chronic disruption at this school are consistent
- Responses to incidents between students at this school are effective
- Responses to incidents between students at this school are consistent

Teachers were also asked whether discipline had changed over the past two years.

Teachers were then asked whether they had ever received training in restorative practices. For teachers who had received such training, three follow-up questions asked about *Understanding Restorative Practices*:

- I believe I understand the principles of the restorative approach
- I am comfortable using restorative practices at school
- I have observed other teachers, administrators, and support staff use restorative practices

Teachers were then asked whether they had received training in restorative practices from YRP in the last 2-3 years. For teachers trained by YRP, 3 follow-up questions asked about *Using Restorative Practices*:

- I have used what I learned in the training
- I use restorative questions and I statements with my students
- I lead circles in my classroom

Teachers were asked whether any students they had referred to the front office had participated in a restorative conference. If so, 4 follow-up questions asked about teachers' perceptions of RJ *Conference Effectiveness*:

- The conference(s) was/were effective in dealing with the student's behavior or an incident
- I received information about the student's progress on meeting the terms of the restorative agreement
- The student ultimately followed the restorative agreement, as agreed at the conference
- Conferences should be used for similar cases in the future

Finally, all survey respondents were asked 2 questions about the *Future Use of RPs* at the school:

- I would like to see the use of restorative practices continued at the school

- I would like to see the use of restorative practices expanded at the school

Survey Results

Exhibit 4 shows the descriptive statistics for each of the indices and coefficient alpha for indices. All indices were rated moderately on agreement. School climate and discipline were on average between agree and disagree, with the lowest agreement that school discipline was effective which had an average agreement of only 2.4 (on a scale where 2 means disagree and 3 means agree). Among those trained, there was mild agreement that they understood RP (3.1), and had used RPs (3.0), and support for future use of RP (3.0), but somewhat lower perceptions of conference effectiveness (2.7).

We also examined the correlations between measures, which are shown in

Exhibit 5. Support for future use of RPs was significantly correlated with the most other measures, as was perceived conference effectiveness, which suggests that more exposure was associated with more positive views of RPs.

Exhibit 4. Descriptive Statistics on Indices across both years of teacher survey.

	N	mean	sd	alpha	# Variables
School Climate	254	2.7	.61	0.88	5
School Discipline	251	2.4	.62	0.93	9
Discipline change last two years	214	2.8	.75		
Ever trained on RPs?	235	85%			
If so, Understand RPs	199	3.1	.51	0.80	3
Trained by YRP last 2-3 years?	199	44%			
If so, RP Use	88	3.0	.57	0.76	3
Referred student who participated in a RJC?	221	65%			
If so, conference Effectiveness	151	2.7	.65	0.88	4
Future RP	230	3.0	.80	0.93	2

Exhibit 5. Correlations among Survey Items.

	School Climate	School Discipline	Discipline Change Last 2 Years	Understand RPs	RP Use	Conference Effectiveness
School Discipline	0.74*					
Discipline Change	0.34*	0.41*				
Understand RPs[1]	0.11	0.16*	0.17*			
RP Use[2]	0.14	0.32*	0.19	0.74*		
Conference Effectiveness[3]	0.44*	0.46*	0.38*	0.24*	0.51*	
Future RP	0.19*	0.21*	0.31*	0.35*	0.57*	.70*

Notes: [1]If ever trained in RP.   [2]If trained by YRP.   [3]If a referred student participated.

Finally, we explored whether being trained by YRP changed teacher perceptions, and whether teachers' perception changed over time as YRP continued to work in the schools. Multiple regression models were used, and both YRP training and survey wave were explored in the same models. To control for differences in the relative sample sizes across schools in the two survey waves, we controlled for school with a set of dummy variables. These are shown in Table 3. We find that individual participation in YRP training was only significantly associated with one measure, namely, whether the teachers perceived the school discipline approach as effective. This seems to mean that when RPs are being used in a school, teachers who have not been trained in RP are less likely to see RPs as an effective approach. Nonetheless, from the first to second school year, most measures became more positive. That is, over time, teachers were more likely to agree that discipline was effective at the school, that they understood RPs, were using RPs, that conferences were effective (among teachers who had referred a student who had participated in a RJ conference), and they expressed more support for future use of RPs. Nonetheless, we see no improvement in teachers' perceptions of overall school climate.

Exhibit 6. Effects of training and survey wave on teacher perceptions.

	TRAINED BY YRP			CHANGE FROM 1ST TO 2ND SURVEY WAVE		
	Coef.	S.E	t	Coef.	S.E.	T
SCHOOL CLIMATE	0.06	0.07	0.87	0.03	0.06	0.43
SCHOOL DISCIPLINE	0.14	0.08	1.76*	0.25	0.07	3.72***
UNDERSTANDING RP	0.11	0.07	1.53	0.14	0.07	1.96**
USE RP[†]	NA	NA	NA	0.30	0.13	2.25**
CONFERENCE EFFECTIVENESS	0.11	0.11	1.03	0.21	0.1	2.13**
FUTURE RP	0.06	0.11	0.57	0.24	0.1	2.41**

*Note: * p<.10; **p<.05 ***p<0.01.*

[†]*Only teachers who reported having received YRP training were asked about whether they had use RPs.*

Teacher Focus Groups

One-hour teacher focus groups were held at the four project schools in Spring and Fall 2018. Teacher focus groups were led by an Urban senior researcher and verbatim notes were taken by an accompanying researcher. In total, there were 6 focus groups with 30 school staff participants.

Focus group protocols were primarily based on the year 1 teacher survey and information gathered on our five implementation site visits during the first 18 months of the project. During these visits the project team captured information from principals, administrators, restorative facilitators, and key partners. These interviews gave key insights into the lessons learned and challenges from implementation. Many stakeholders spoke about the experiences of teachers. The teacher survey instrument helped to see where teacher focus groups could provide more depth to survey responses.

Focus group transcripts were analyzed using NVIVO qualitative software. Early in the project, the project team came together to use an inductive approach to develop codes based on notes from the first few site visits and conversations with key stakeholders. Over time, the project team amended the coding structure when necessary. One researcher coded the focus group transcripts and reviewed the analysis with the project team.

Results

Focus group discussions and open-ended responses from the survey provided more depth on teacher perceptions. Feedback from teachers demonstrates important insights on the benefits of restorative practices and key contributors and barriers to training, implementing restorative practices and conferences, and sustainability.

When asked about the benefits of restorative practices in general, teachers most often mentioned restorative practices being a non-punitive and more respectful approach to working with students (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7. Most Common Open Ended Survey Responses on Benefits of Restorative Practices.

	2017		2018	
Category	Count	%	Count	%
Helps students own/understand their behaviors/impact	25	23%	14	20%
It is non- punitive and a more respectful approach	24	22%	17	24%
It helps build community/better school environment	19	18%	6	8%
Helps students build relationships with staff and students	16	15%	10	14%
Other	7	7%	6	8%
Negative	7	7%	4	6%
Helps students have a voice in the process and feel empowered	5	5%	10	14%
Gets at the root causes and main issues	4	4%	4	6%
Total	107		71	

In focus groups, teachers homed in on similar themes in terms of how the restorative practices program had benefitted their students. One teacher explained the approach:

> *"(It) lets them know that we're not going to [be] punitive, they're not in trouble. And if they're in trouble it's a relief to them to tell their story and have it heard, there can be some benefits to having that and having them feel heard. And it's huge because we have a diverse population, and so often kids feel like they don't have a voice and they feel like they're part of a minority that is not being heard, and very disconnected.*

Teachers also reflected on the benefits of restorative practices in de-escalating tense situations and focusing on productive dialogue. As one teacher noted,

> *RJ has been useful for blow-up moments, being able to repair relationships, [this was] not an opportunity that was (possible) in (my previous school), feels like it's taken root here more than at previous school*

Others noted that they were impressed and satisfied that their students really took ownership of restorative tools and used them on their own or advocated for them in class. One teacher shared an example of students consistently asking to circle up in the classroom and another teacher highlighted her students managing and maintaining a relationship after a big fight.

Training

Through the focus groups, teachers shared about different elements of the training including access, quantity, and quality. Those that did attend the YRP training were impressed by the quality of the program. Teachers appreciated that it allowed them to look introspectively at their practices and approaches to students. This was the case whether they were new to the field or had been teaching over 30 years. They felt that the exercises assigned to them outside the training helped them build on their skills. For example, one staff member noted that the activity focused on recognizing your own triggers, not just in school, was particularly insightful. Others referenced the importance of the tools learned in the training (e.g. "I statements") and how that affected their class community.

Teachers at all schools noted that the training was sometimes hard to access. Almost all trainings took place in the afternoon at a site 20 minutes from the schools. Teachers noted that their busy schedules did not allow for them to leave right after school ended to attend trainings. Newer teachers felt that opportunities for training were not as well advertised and did not get as much attention from their school administrators. There was a feeling that there were big training pushes in the initial year and a half of the project, but then they trickled off.

Teachers were eager for training. Many referenced that training should be offered at the school and incorporated more into school activities. Teachers felt that having widespread trainings in the school would help facilitate buy in and the success of implementation. There was also reference to more refresher trainings and differentiated trainings needed.

Implementing Restorative Practices

Teachers felt that the main challenges implementing restorative practices were consistency of implementation, lack of time and resources, and lack of consequences, and students not taking the program seriously (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8. Challenges of Implementing Restorative Practices: Most Common Open-Ended Survey Responses.

	2017		2018		Total	
CHALLENGE	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Not Implemented well and consistently	33	29%	16	22%	49	26%
Lack of time and Resources	28	25%	17	23%	45	24%
Lack of Consequences/Students not taking it seriously	26	23%	16	22%	42	22%
Teacher and Staff Buy in	14	12%	9	12%	23	12%
Not effective for many students	6	5%	10	14%	16	9%
Parent involvement	4	4%	2	3%	6	3%
Other	3	3%	4	5%	7	4%
Total	114		74		188	

On the topic of consistency, teachers in focus groups noted that the rules for restorative practices implementation appeared to be changing on the fly. Many wanted more protocols and processes in place and followed. Some noted that the introduction of restorative practices went well, but the integration and take-up at school was spotty and at times uncoordinated. They noted that teacher and administrator's response to behavior incidents differed by case and situation, which sent a confusing signal for students and teachers. This was true in terms of initial response and consequences. Some felt that restorative practices had become a sort of black box, as one teacher noted,

> *I personally feel a disconnect with teachers and administrators in terms of behavior. When a student misbehaves, the administration does something and my student came back to class, but I had no say. I was not aware what occurred and that's an issue. We are supposed to work together and that's not happening*

There were issues with the consistency of administrators, but also in how the restorative tools were used at the school. Many teachers noted that only part of the school staff was bought into the program. Some reported that some of their colleagues would mock the use of restorative practices and "never took it seriously." One teacher gave an example of using restorative practices in their classroom, but then a student going to another classroom where a teacher relied on more traditionally punitive measures (e.g. kicking kids out of class). Others confirmed that this theme of inconsistent use was confusing for teachers and student alike.

Teachers in the survey and focus groups noted a lack of time and resources to implement restorative practices. One resounding theme throughout our conversations with teachers was the value of the RP facilitators. Facilitators were helpful in supporting staff to use the restorative tools, meeting with students and parents, and getting to root causes en-route to conferencing. In most cases, facilitators were also seen as a key conduit between administrators, teachers, and students.

But staff felt that they needed more facilitators or more time from facilitators given all their needs. Turnover amongst facilitators was cited as a challenge to consistent support. Teachers also felt

that they did not always have the time or support to commit to restorative practices in addition to all their other duties. At one school, the use of restorative practices as a professional development-personal learning goal helped teachers commit time to learning and using restorative practice tools.

In some cases, teachers reported that students saw restorative practices as a "reward" and it contributed to an overall lack of consequences. Teachers felt the idea of non-punitive is good in theory, but that there still needs to be some action that holds students accountable. In most cases, teachers were referring to the restorative practices and not necessarily to the conferences, which held more weight in terms of accountability and follow up.

Conferences

Feedback on restorative conferences was generally positive. Only about a third of the teachers in the focus groups had been involved in conferences, but those that were, were appreciative of the results. Reflecting on the conference and restitution process, one teacher noted,

> *The best part of the conference is that everyone was on the same page, parent, admin, dean of culture. Every kid ended up doing a poster of withdrawal effects of marijuana and it's still up. And the kids look at it and I talk to them about it…And that's what was meaningful about the conference, it was a process.*

Other teachers noted that the involvement of the parent in general signals to the student the seriousness of the matter and helps drive home the accountability aspect. Those that participated in conferences or even referred students to conferences, overwhelmingly wanted to see the use of conferences continue.

Despite positive views on conferences, there were still some challenges. Some noted that the conference process was too time consuming and long, and it needed to be quicker to successfully address student behavior. Others noted that while valuable, there needed to be alternatives to conferences to handle students such as quicker mediations without parents.

Sustainability

Almost all teachers wanted to see the continuation of restorative practices at their schools. Teachers had concerns that the absence of a YRP facilitator would inhibit sustainability. Many spoke about a need for someone, likely an administrator, to own the issue and serve as a champion for restorative practices. Others felt that the school had to commit to restorative practices by heightening visibility. As one teacher noted,

> *As a community, if we are going to adopt restorative practices IT needs to be visible in every classroom, and to have the tools on the wall not only for us but for the kids as well. Have it posted in every classroom.*

Conclusion

The focus groups and open-ended survey questions demonstrate that teachers valued restorative practices and a more thoughtful approach to communicating with students and solving problems. These focus group results are largely consistent with the survey results, which showed moderate teacher support for RPs, albeit somewhat less support for RJ conferences *per se.* In addition*,* that support increased over time, presumably due to more experience with the school's use of RPs and with YRP staff involvement at the schools.

However, in focus groups and open-ended survey items, teachers did raise key concerns around implementation, which included buy in, consistency, shifting school culture, and leadership vision. Despite this, most teachers wanted their schools to continue using restorative practices.

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