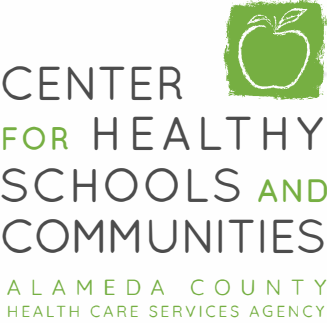


Restorative Justice in Action

Lessons Learned for Successful Implementation
of Restorative Justice





Acknowledgments

Our deepest thanks to everyone who contributed their time, passion, wisdom and expertise to this document. Thank you to those who engage in this complex and critical work every day and who enrich the lives of young people and their families. We honor you for leading with, and modeling, radical love. Thank you for working towards the actualization of Dr. Martin Luther King’s vision of the Beloved Community, “the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age”.

This document is based on ten interviews we did with Bay Area school districts and restorative justice technical assistance providers. This document would not have been possible without the profound contributions from each of them. The school districts and organizations we interviewed are: Oakland Unified; San Lorenzo Unified; San Francisco Unified; San Mateo County Office of Education; El Cerrito High School, West Contra Costa Unified; Circle Up; RYSE Center; SEEDS; Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY); and YR Media. Thank you for your partnership, leadership and transformative vision in this work.

For access to a free Restorative Justice in Schools resource document, please click [here](#). It will take you to a brief registration page and then on to the resource document.

This document was written and supervised by Sabrina Berger, Jamie Harris and Kimi Sakashita.

Comments, questions, and request for additional information can be directed to:
sabrina.berger@acgov.org

Alameda County Center for Healthy Schools and Communities
1000 San Leandro Blvd., Suite 300
San Leandro, CA 94577
achealthyschools.org

Restorative Justice in Action

Lessons Learned for Successful Implementation of Restorative Justice

Contents

Introduction	3
1. What is Restorative Justice?.....	3
2. Building Resilience for All Students.....	5
3. Over-Criminalization of Youth.....	6
4. Briefing Summary.....	8
Lessons Learned	9
1. Take Time and Plan.....	9
Implementation Planning Tips	11
2. Ensure Leadership Commitment.....	13
3. Make a Radical Equity Shift	15
4. Lay a Strong Foundation: Culture and Climate.....	17
Tips for Laying a Strong Foundation	19
5. Integrate with Other Priorities and Initiatives	20
6. Build and Maintain Support and Commitment.....	23
Outreach and Marketing Materials.....	23
Exposure and Experiential Learning.....	23
Restorative Practice Ambassadors	24
Conclusion.....	24

Introduction

"The power of collective caring – it's power to break down or penetrate walls of separation, it's power to heal, bring reassurance, and peace, and it's power to bind our separate lives into a community of deep and eternal unity."¹

Given current and historical conditions of inequity and harm, largely rooted in institutional racism, we must imagine a new way for our schools to be organized. We cannot continue to push students of color out through policies like “zero tolerance,” a contemporary iteration of long-standing discriminatory practices. We cannot continue to privilege order and conformity over healthy relationships and our intrinsic need to be seen and known.

Restorative Justice (RJ) is an essential component of creating positive school cultures and climates for all youth because it can assist in reducing inequities in our education system, mitigate the negative impacts of trauma, and improve outcomes for students. As more school districts undertake efforts to improve their culture and climate, there has been a shift in thinking about the need to prioritize, nurture, and maintain healthy relationships among all members of the school community, and a rapidly increasing interest in district-wide implementation of RJ. This shift in thinking is perfectly aligned with the central values of RJ, which asserts that “a restorative school engages both students and adults to recognize, celebrate, and build upon all that is good about their school, and to examine and change harmful beliefs, pedagogies, norms and policies, implicit bias and practices that marginalize, oppress, or exclude any group or individual.”³

The Center for Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) is committed to connecting those who are deeply engaged in RJ in schools with those who are interested in understanding and learning how RJ works. This brief reflects the work of those organizations and individuals who are leading RJ work across the Bay Area. Our strong belief in RJ is supported by the findings in this paper – we owe restorative practices to our youth. We believe the experience of those in the field is critical to ongoing RJ conversations and the expansion of RJ practices in our schools.

This brief is based on ten interviews with school districts in the Bay Area and RJ technical assistance providers who are implementing RJ on a large scale. The context for the RJ movement and the need for RJ in schools is followed by our findings from these interviews. Snapshots and examples from participating programs are included throughout the paper and in the Appendix.

1. What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative Justice is a philosophy, a shift in thinking, orientation, and being. RJ is a move away from a punitive response, one that removes or pushes people out of their communities, toward one that centers on the well-being of relationships and dedication to the inclusion of ALL members of a

¹ Holly Bridges, Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community. Carolyn Boyes-Watson & Kay Pranis

² <https://aesimpact.org/school-climate-and-culture/>

³ NACRJ Policy statement on RP in K-12 Education

community. RJ is rooted in the long indigenous tradition of the Circle process. “In these traditions, Circles are far more than a technique; they are a way of life. Circles embody a philosophy, principles, and values that apply whether people are sitting in circles or not.”⁴ We are indebted to the many indigenous communities that continue to use circle-like processes today. We are deeply grateful for the wisdom they have shared, which we carry forward.

Restorative practices (RP) are those practices that embody and assist in creating the shift in thinking and being from a punitive response to a restorative one. These practices exist across a three-tiered continuum of support that includes universal prevention-based efforts that build community and relationships (Tier 1); targeted interventions once harm has occurred (Tier 2); and more intensive strategies focused on re-integration of students (Tier 3).

Restorative practices help strengthen the communication between adults on campus and are used in the classroom with students to create a caring and supportive environment with a focus on relationship building. They are also used to re-enter students into school after suspensions, expulsion, or incarceration.⁵

Figure 1. Changing Lens

CHANGING LENSES

In his seminal work, *Changing Lenses*, Howard Zehr examined the way in which we typically respond to crime and wrongdoing. Zehr contrasts questions the criminal justice system asks with restorative questions.

Questions the current systems try to address:

- What rules or laws were broken?
- Who broke them?
- What do they deserve?

Whereas, Restorative Justice asks:

- What is the harm caused and to whom?
- What are the needs and obligations that have arisen?
- Who has the obligation to address the needs, to repair the harms, to restore relationships?



Tier 1 RP, such as community building circles, help to build relationships, strengthen social and emotional skills, and create shared values and guidelines.⁶ Tier 1 practices include professional training

⁴ <http://www.livingjusticepress.org/?SEC=0F6FA816-E094-4B96-8F39-9922F67306E5>

⁵ San Lorenzo Unified Restorative Practices Guide, 2018-2019

⁶ <https://www.ousd.org/restorativejustice>

opportunities for staff to learn what RJ is and to experience community building circles. This professional learning opportunity serves to strengthen the adult culture and connection, while ensuring that all members of the adult community are operating with the same definitions and understanding of RJ and RP.

Through harm circles and restorative conversations, Tier 2 RP focuses on the repair of relationship when harm or conflict has occurred. Tier 3 consists of 1:1 support focused on the re-entry of students. These practices include but are not limited to re-entry and welcome circles following a suspension, explosion, incarceration, 5150, or other incidents, which may have caused an interruption in student learning and school participation. Each of these practices are an integral part of the creation and maintenance of a restorative school.

2. Building Resilience for All Students

"Though school-based restorative justice offers a more equitable and respectful alternative to dealing with disciplinary infractions, it is also a proactive strategy to create a culture of connectivity where all members of the school community feel valued and thrive. Restorative justice is a profoundly relational practice."

—OUSD/RJOY Implementation Guide.⁷

Restorative justice builds resilience for all students regardless of background and history.

In Alameda County, as in the rest of the nation, the place you live can determine your access to opportunities that support health and academic success. Due to the persistent legacy of discriminatory policies and practices tied to race and socio-economic status, young people of color are more likely to live in disinvested neighborhoods. Families and children in such neighborhoods can experience a variety of negative health, education, and life outcomes. As compared to their white counterparts living in affluent, high-opportunity communities, these youth experience lower life expectancy (7-15 years lower expectancy); greater likelihood of mental health issues like major depression and anxiety (2.7 times); greater likelihood of scoring below proficient on statewide English tests (2.4 times); lower high school graduation rates (4 times less likely); and high risk of incarceration for overwhelmingly non-violent offenses (5 times more likely). Restorative Justice can assist in reducing inequities in our education system and improve these outcomes for students.

RJ is also an essential component of creating positive school cultures that can mitigate the negative impacts of trauma. Schools can be an extraordinary protective factor in the lives of students coping with toxic stress. Restorative practices can increase the sense of belonging for all students, staff, and members of the school community, which leads to more effective teaching and more successful students. Exposure to trauma can interfere with cognitive processes, including "concentration, memory, and language abilities that children need to function well in school."⁸ Trauma also frequently affects perception and emotion in ways that can make learning and social interaction extremely difficult:

⁷ <https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/134/BTC-OUSD-I-IG-08b-web.pdf> |

⁸ Streeck-Fischer, A., and van der Kolk, B.A., 2000, "Down Will Come Baby, Cradle and All: Diagnostic and Therapeutic Implications of Chronic Trauma on Child Development," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 34: 903–918.

⁹ Bremner, J.D., and Narayan, M., 1998, "The Effects of Stress on Memory and the Hippocampus Throughout the Life Cycle: Implications for Childhood Development and Aging," *Development and Psychopathology*, 10: 871–885; 875.

¹⁰ Beers, S.R., and De Bellis, M.D., 2002, "Neuropsychological Function in Children with Maltreatment-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 159(3): 483–48.

students may scan the classroom for danger, and spend much of their learning time in a “flight, fright, or freeze” mode.⁹ This state of arousal negatively impacts the workings of the frontal cortex,¹⁰ used for behavior regulation and reasoning, and can lead to behaviors such as acting out in a disruptive way or staring out the window during a lesson.¹¹

The research also affirms that caring relationships with peers and adults, and social-emotional skills such as attunement, co-regulation, and self-efficacy, are all vital protective factors that build resiliency and help to retrain the brain away from trauma responses. RJ connects to a long and deep cultural tradition that places, at its center, the creation and prioritization of healthy relationships which then strengthen both students’ and teachers’ social emotional skills and resilience. “RJ promotes values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches for being in community. These approaches validate the experiences and needs of everyone within the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed, or harmed. These approaches allow us to act and respond in ways that are healing rather than alienating or coercive.”¹² Schools that create restorative, instead of punitive environments, not only build relationships and resiliency, but take a huge step toward becoming schools that work for all students, regardless of background and history.

3. Over-Criminalization of Youth

In addition to the impact restorative practices can have on creating a more inclusive, equitable, and positive school culture, the principles and practices which guide RJ offer a new road map for how schools respond to “challenging behaviors” and address harm.

Unfortunately, a common response in schools has been to address student disengagement or disenfranchisement through a focus on “disruptive behaviors” to be addressed through punitive policies such as zero tolerance. These policies have played a major role in establishing what we now understand as the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline describes a process through which students are pushed out of the school system and enter into the criminal justice system. This disproportionately impacts the most disenfranchised communities, namely Black and students of color, students with IEPs, and those who are trauma impacted.¹³ The criminalization of young people not only pushes them out of the school system, it disconnects them from their family and wider community.

The shift toward law enforcement on school campuses and policies which view developmentally appropriate adolescent behavior (i.e., impulsivity and poor judgement leading to such things as fighting, drawing on desks, cutting class) as criminal behavior, means that schools now often rely on police officers to manage student behavior. “A typical schoolyard fight is labeled as a felony assault; and students who play ‘catch’ with a teacher’s hat are charged with robbery.”¹⁴ Misconduct is part of a young person’s developmental process and punitive responses limit a young person’s opportunity to learn and grow from their “mistakes;” it also makes them feel unwelcome and unwanted within their school community.

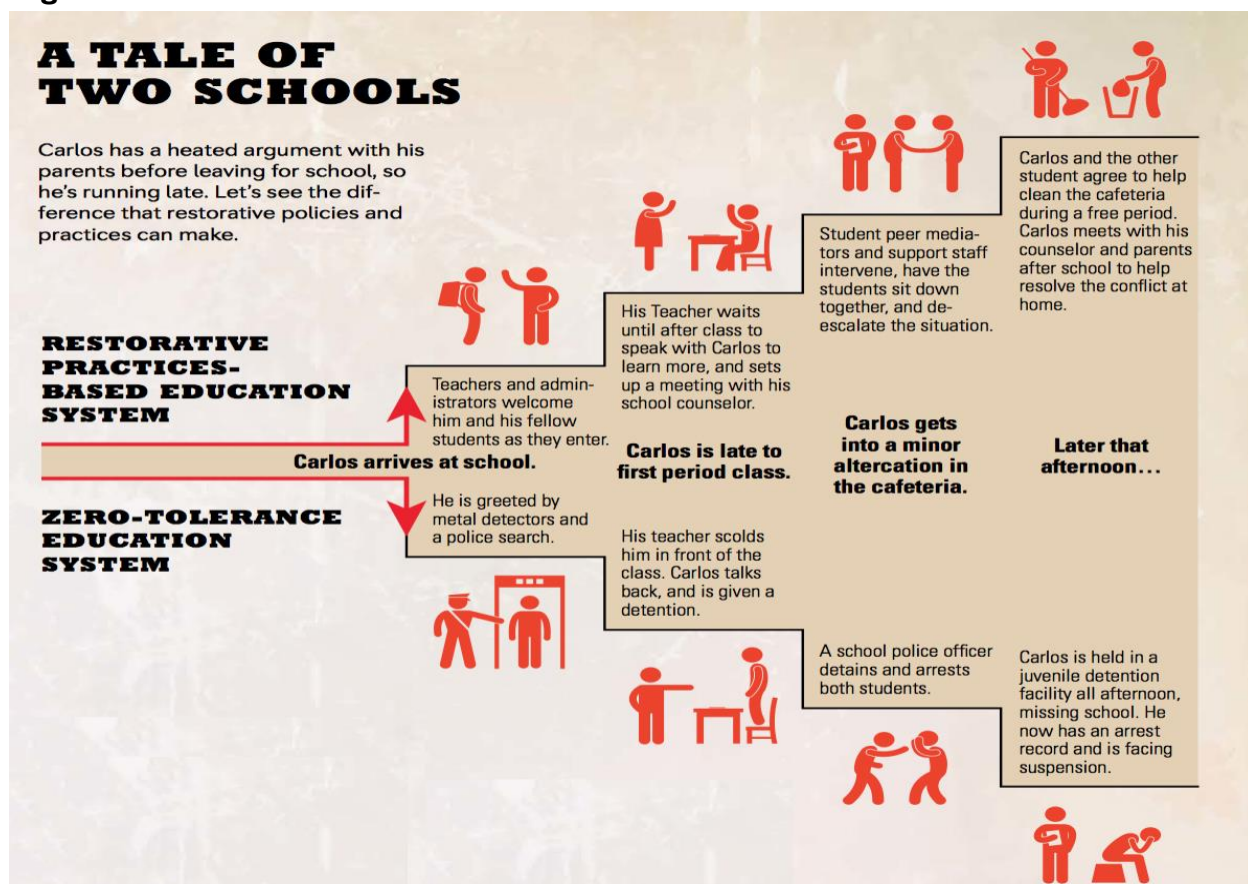
¹¹ Burke, N. J., Hellman, J. L., Scott, B.G., Weems, C.F., and Carrion, V.G., 2011, “The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on an Urban Pediatric Population,” *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35(6), 408–413. Epub 2011 Jun 8.

¹² Little Book of Restorative Discipline for schools, pg. 15

¹³ <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/school-prison-pipeline-infographic> <https://dredf.org/legal-advocacy/school-to-prison-pipeline/>

¹⁴ <https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2026&context=facpub>

Figure 2. A Tale of Two Schools 15



RJ and RP offer powerful alternatives to punitive responses and policies. When members of the school community engage in harmful or hurtful behavior, RJ “concerns itself with appropriate consequences that encourage accountability – but accountability that emphasizes empathy and repair of harm.”¹⁵ However, for a school to move from punitive to restorative ways of operating, a shift in mindset is required, along with a significant investment of time and energy.

RJ has been applied in schools across the world to successfully build healthy school communities, support students and teachers, and address discipline issues. But RJ is not another program to be imposed on schools – it is a philosophy, a way of being and relating. Promising and evidence-based programs, such as Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), Responsive Classroom, Second Step, and social-emotional learning, assist in building a foundation and culture of caring. These kinds of programs and initiatives complement RJ practices.

Attending school creates opportunities for students to develop social-emotional, as well as academic intelligence, and to build social and human capital. Therefore, education as an institution has the potential to either reinforce or interrupt the cycle of race and class-based inequities in our society. School communities that embrace a restorative approach build community, celebrate accomplishments, transform conflict, rebuild relationships that have been harmed, and reintegrate students who have been suspended or otherwise pushed out.

¹⁵ <http://neatoday.org/2014/06/18/sowing-empathy-and-justice-in-schools-through-restorative-practices/>

¹⁶ The Little Book of Restorative Discipline for Schools, pg. 13

4. Briefing Summary

This briefing reflects the work of those organizations and individuals who are leading RJ work across the Bay Area. We believe the RJ experience of those in the field is critical to ongoing RJ conversations and the expansion of RJ practices in our schools. Lessons learned described in this briefing are based on ten interviews with Bay Area school districts and RJ technical assistance providers who are implementing RJ on a large scale. In summary, they are:

- Take time and plan. Success of an RJ plan depends on dedicating time and resources to thoughtful planning, clear goals, and an articulated approach to implementation.
- Ensure leadership commitment. Leadership commitment and deep engagement is critical to RJ success. Leadership is required in order to shift toward modeling restorative practices with staff, students, and families; and standing behind the effort as a long-term transformation through both successes and inevitable challenges.
- Make a radical shift in response to implicit bias, race, and equity work.
- Lay a strong foundation of culture and climate.
- Integrate with other priorities and initiatives.
- Build and maintain support and commitment.



Lessons Learned

The following presents key lessons learned on the journey to RJ implementation in the Bay Area, by organizations and RJ practitioners.

1. Take Time and Plan

Restorative Justice implementation in the context of school systems is difficult and complex. Success involves dedicating time and resources to thoughtful planning that sets realistic expectations, clear goals, and an articulated approach to implementation.

Often RJ's core value of centralizing the development and maintenance of relationships is in direct conflict with policies and practices that have shaped schools for decades. It is important for those involved in the RJ implementation process to recognize that change requires transformation of staff and schools and must be approached as a long-term change initiative rather than a more traditional adoption of a new curriculum. In their guide to implementation of RJ in Schools, SEEDS stresses the importance of having realistic goals and expectations:

"Identify the systems, policies, and practices that will need to change to support sustainable pursuit of RJ through implementation of RP. Evaluating the processes allows schools to have realistic goals and focus regarding RJ implementation. It encourages structural and systemic change to support the cultural shift. It also allows the schools to gain a more realistic perspective on where they are experiencing some breakdowns."¹⁷

Time is always at a premium in districts; however, it is important for those leading the implementation process to make space for reflection, learning, and planning before starting district-wide implementation. This includes thinking explicitly about how implementation will happen. Implementation can involve starting small with a few pilot school sites; it can involve a broad district-wide effort, such as training all staff in Tier I community building circles; or it can involve some combination of both. There is no one right way to begin the implementation process. But it is important to have an articulated and well thought out approach, and to allow time to assess and modify the approach as needed. The following are three examples of how Bay Area school districts approached implementation of RJ. Examples reflect similarities in approach (such as use of widespread trainings to build understanding and momentum) and differences, based on the unique needs and strengths of each district.

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) took a multilayer approach towards RP implementation.¹⁸ In the 2010-2011 school year, SFUSD hired a .5 FTE Restorative Practices Coordinator and began moving the work forward in a key number of ways. In partnership with The Institute for Restorative Practices,¹⁹ six hours *Introduction to Restorative Practices* trainings were offered to targeted groups, such as central office leadership, school site administrators, and student support services staff. All school sites were offered a one-hour introduction to RP presentation. The district hosted RP community forums to engage community partners. Three school sites were identified to

¹⁷ SEEDS, *Introduction to Restorative Justice in Schools*, 2019

¹⁸ <https://www.healthiersf.org/RestorativePractices/About/5yearPlan.php>

¹⁹ <https://www.iirp.edu/>

become RP demonstration schools. And there was a commitment to strengthen SFUSD's capacity to provide ongoing training and implementation support through training and consultation with a number of RJ practitioners and organizations.²⁰

Oakland Unified School District's (OUSD) approach towards RJ implementation was multifaceted. They started with both voluntary trainings for school site staff to build interest and capacity (which was hosted at a central office), and pilot programs at two middle schools. The pilot schools identified were chosen because they had the highest, racially disproportionate rates of suspensions. OUSD, in partnership with RJ for Oakland Youth (RJOY), initially introduced RJ to the community at Cole Middle School in 2006-2007.

*"A teacher and Restorative Justice Coordinator taught an elective class in Restorative Justice and conducted workshops in classrooms, facilitating discussion on justice and oppression, social-emotional intelligence, and taking responsibility. The students learned about Restorative Justice Philosophy, principles, and practices."*²¹

RJ at Cole Middle School proved to be profoundly impactful, resulting in: reduced suspension rates by 87%, elimination of violence, higher test scores, and elimination of teacher attrition.²² The following year, OUSD received a small grant, which they used to train middle school staff in an effort to increase awareness of RJ principles and practices and build capacity. Simultaneously, OUSD made a commitment to investing in RJ youth leadership. Around the time that RJ principles and practices were being piloted in middle schools across the district, the peer conflict mediator programs in middle schools expanded their training and support to include circles to create community and repair harm. Over time and with the eventual hire of a program manager for youth engagement within the RJ department,²³ peer RJ has become one of the most important and consistent elements of RJ implementation and the shifting of culture within OUSD.²⁴

San Lorenzo Unified's (SLzUSD) vision for restorative practices was born out of a year-long task force. As described in the origin story below, the task force culminated in a growing understanding of and commitment to RP, and to the creation of a dedicated position – the RP Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA). Once the TSA was hired, SLzUSD spent some months in a learning phase, deepening their understanding of RP through trainings and connections with other RP practitioners engaged in similar work. During this time, the RP TSA was also in conversation with district leadership about their vision and hopes for RP implementation. It was decided that the first step in rolling out RP would be with staff. An intentional decision was made to start at the adult-to-adult level and begin the work of shifting how adults see and interact with one another. Concretely, this meant presenting an overview of what RP was to staff at all school sites, as well as a two-day, district-wide, immersive RP experience for all school site teams (including principals) which deepened their understanding of the broad strokes of RP. Once RP had been introduced to staff across the district, it moved into the next phase of implementation. School site leaders could request the RP TSA staff training on specific restorative practices. They could also have school site members sign up to participate in occasional training at the

²⁰ RJ Practitioners and organizations included; International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), Educators for Social Responsibility, Oakland Unified School District, RJOY, Amos Clifford, Howard Zehr, Rita Alfred, Lorraine Stutzman-Amstutz and Judy Mullet, Community Justice for Youth Institute, Nancy Riestenberg

²¹ Restorative Justice: A Working Guide for Our Schools

²² <https://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CSHA-RJOY-Restorative-Justice-Schools-060415.pdf>

²³ Heather Manchester, Restorative Justice Program Manager for Youth Engagement

²⁴ OUSD Peer Restorative Justice Program Guide, 2nd edition

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?u=v&pid=sites&srcid=b3VzZC5rMTluY2EudXN8b3VzZC1yailyZXNvdXJjZXN8Z3g6MzNmYjU2MmJiYzI1MTdlZg>

central office. All schools were invited and strongly encouraged to apply for additional resources to stipend an RJ Teacher Leader.

San Lorenzo Unified (SLZUSD) RP Origin Story

At the start of the 2012-2013 school year, the Director of Student Support Services formed a voluntary Task Force on Restorative Practices comprised of principals, teachers, classified staff, district staff, and community-based agencies. The purpose of the task force was to revise the district's discipline matrix. Some meetings were in person, but many were virtual gatherings to deepen the Task Force's understanding of RP.

Much of those first few months were spent reading articles and listening to webinars and guest speakers. In the spring, the Task Force held stakeholder meetings with union representatives, principals, vice principals, and other community members to give an overview of RP and share their first steps towards implementing RP within the district. The Task Force shared a revision to the elementary and secondary discipline matrix. This revised matrix offered restorative responses to "challenging behavior," which staff were encouraged to use before moving on to more standard disciplinary consequences.

Principals' and vice principals' participation in these stakeholder meetings led to their willingness to support both the revised discipline matrix and the funding of a new district level position - Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA) for Restorative Practices. These important steps to RP implementation were approved by the school board in the spring of 2013. The work of the RP Task Force became the launch of SLZUSD's commitment to RP.

Implementation Planning Tips

Tip #1: Take Your Time; Don't Roll out Too Fast!

RJ implementation takes time and the process should go at a gradual pace. Repeatedly, those interviewed stressed the need to be thoughtful and slow in the planning and implementation of RJ. Challenges arise when the rollout happens too quickly, and people experience a negligent or harmful experience in circle. Often, implementation can be rushed for reasons which may, on the surface, seem like an encouraging sign of "buy-in." The enthusiasm and transformative experience people have in circle can create a sense of urgency and the excitement to "become" an RJ school or district before planning, support, and reflective practices are in place. While excitement and enthusiasm are important and necessary, so is the need to properly train, re-train, and support those who are leading RP, such as community building circles, restorative conversations, and harm circles.

Tip #2: Be Clear on Roles and Expectations

It is important to be clear, from the beginning, regarding expectations for staff following an RJ training. If the first step is simply an opportunity for staff to learn what RJ is and to have the experience of being in a community building circle, then that should be explicit. If staff are expected to hold community building circles in their own classes, or work spheres as a result of training, then that too should be explicit. Staff will need support, additional training, and feedback as they begin to use new skills. Equally important is the need to be clear about roles and responsibilities. Multiple interviewees shared stories of staff receiving minimal training; yet, because of their passion and excitement about RJ, they began facilitating circles (community building, harm, and re-entry circles) when they were unprepared. When RJ circles are facilitated by someone who does not have enough training or support, the experience can cause more harm than healing, negatively impact people's experience and impressions of what RJ is, and leave participants unwilling to participate in future circle processes.

Tip #3: Don't Mandate!

Do not start out by mandating RJ practices. Many practitioners spoke about the importance of meeting people where they are and giving them the opportunity to participate in an RJ circle experience, which piques interest and excitement. Others discussed how mandating RJ can lead to feelings of resentment and result in people pushing back on the philosophy and practices. On a fundamental level, mandating that staff or students participate in RJ practices runs antithetical to the philosophy and values of RJ. “The underlying premise of restorative practice is that people are happier, more cooperative, more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things with them rather than to them or for them.”²⁵ When we mandate participation, we are wielding our authoritative power over someone else, which is the antithesis of RJ. As with all major changes, there comes a point in RJ when the culture shifts significantly from a punitive to a restorative one; and at that point, districts and schools may decide that it is no longer an option for staff to “opt out” of the values, principles, and practices of RJ.

RJ Implementation Without the Groundwork

In the 2014-2015 school year, a high school in the Bay Area made the decision to move away from exclusionary discipline and to change the response to disruptive behavior toward a restorative approach. The decision to begin a school-wide focus on RP was part of a broader district focus on addressing racial disparities in discipline. The move was a collaborative one, led by the principal, assistant principal, and leadership from the health and wellness center.

With the support of an outside agency, two professional development days at the start of the school year were spent giving staff an immersive experience in RP. The training consisted of staff being given time to experience and practice the community building tools. They were given explanations regarding different types of restorative circles (harm, re-entry, welcome, etc.). Staff experienced how powerful RP could be and were enthusiastic about moving forward. The school year began with staff on board; but their enthusiasm broke down almost immediately as it became clear that there was no clarity regarding roles and no plan for how implementation should happen. Teachers with a lack of proper training were attempting to hold harm circles with their classes of 30 or more students. This resulted in negative experiences, which they shared with other colleagues. Others gave up preparation time or got substitutes to cover their classrooms to participate in harm circles. In some instances, staff had positive experiences in the harm circle; but when a youth engaged in the same or similar behaviors, they became disillusioned about the value of RJ, believing it “didn’t work.” This result occurred because there had not been proper RJ framing or training. Staff didn’t understand that moving from a punitive to a restorative environment would be a long and lengthy process. While many of the practices and values of RJ have continued throughout the school, in individual classrooms and spaces, the goal of whole school RJ implementation has not yet been achieved.

²⁵ The Restorative Practices Handbook, Costello and Wachtel

2. Ensure Leadership Commitment

Shifting from punitive to restorative approaches requires deep commitment and engagement of district and school leaders. Leadership must understand the philosophic shift, model restorative practices with staff, students, and families, and be willing to stand behind the effort as a long-term transformation through both successes and inevitable challenges.

All RJ practitioners interviewed discussed the importance of deep engagement by school and district leadership in RJ implementation. They stressed the importance of leadership participation in RJ trainings and professional development. Practitioners described how critical such involvement was on many levels, both to ensure leadership understanding of the benefits and challenges of RJ, and to serve as a leadership model for engagement and participation to their staff and the wider school community.

Some practitioners, such as SEEDS' Director of School Services, spoke about engaging leadership in visioning. They recommended asking leaders questions such as, "What do you want people to say about your district or school in three years? How do you want them to feel? What are the current limits to that vision?" They spoke of the importance of leadership's involvement in helping to prioritize and give weight to the work. If the work of shifting culture starts with adults, then school administrators have a responsibility to lead this shift in thinking and doing. Leadership is also needed to give "permission" to prioritize restorative practices. Other practitioners discussed how morale and the adult culture improves when a district or site leader makes scheduling changes to create embedded time for things like school-wide RJ learning and practices or prioritizes ongoing professional development to train staff on the philosophy, values, and practices of RJ.

It is also critical that district and school leadership remain committed to restorative alternatives to discipline when the process takes a while to demonstrate effectiveness. The initial stages of RJ implementation can leave staff feeling like they have lost control or even that there is "no discipline." Moving from a punishment-based culture to a culture based on accountability is a radical shift in power and responsibility that requires understanding and commitment at all levels.



RYSE Youth Center

RYSE Youth Center in Richmond, California, provides an example of what an organization can look like when leadership has a deep understanding of a restorative approach and a commitment to building that approach into all aspects of the organization. The RYSE Center creates safe spaces grounded in social justice for young people to love, learn, educate, heal, and transform lives and communities. RYSE's guiding principles echo core tenets of restorative justice:

- **Youth-driven**
- **Multiracial solidarity**
- **Healing-centered relationships:** Honoring the lived experiences of both youth and adults by engaging in relationships that center inquiry, connection, and healing
- **Resistance to injustice**
- **Integrity and accountability:** Holding ourselves, our members, and our community accountable to our values and repairing and restoring when trust is broken
- **Dynamic and responsive**
- **Lead with love**

RYSE's origin story is a testament to Leadership Commitment to creating a restorative space with young people. It was created through the vision and hard work of youth organizers and their adult allies. Early organizing efforts to raise what they identified as priorities included a youth-led assessment and campaign. It included adult allies from the youth development field and county leaders supporting the youth organizers working to "address the emotional, mental, and political health of local youth." After years of advocacy and design work, RYSE opened in a building acquired and dedicated by the County (now owned by RYSE). They got to work building the culture, programs, membership, and partnerships that now make it a dynamic, caring, and essential space for youth. The founding team spent over six months engaged in developing values and principles that guide the work and interactions every day.

One of the ways RYSE leadership embeds those values and principles is their commitment to nonviolent communication. Non Violent Communication (NVC) is described by the founder Marshall Rosenberg as "a specific approach to communicating—both speaking and listening—that leads us to give from the heart, connecting us with ourselves and with each other in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish." NVC is rooted in social justice, including anti-war and anti-imperialist movements. It acknowledges the structural violence and harm that communities experience, so that they can more meaningfully tend to the community-level and interpersonal harm and build collective love and collective power. The model has four steps which share similar RJ roots and values: observations, feelings, needs, requests. RYSE leadership dedicates time and resources to scaffolding both staff and youth in NVC. Staff and members are trained in the approach, strategy, and practice so that it is embedded in all they do – a way of RYSE life. When a situation calls for a more intensive level of conversation or intervention, they are supported by structured protocols including more experienced facilitators and circle holders. RYSE employs NVC with and between youth, between staff, and with partners.

RYSE's leadership commitment to a restorative approach extends to supporting healing-centered relationships among staff, many of whom have come through the Center's own youth membership. Because RYSE is emotionally demanding work, healing and restorative practices are available to support staff. These include staff development and scaffolding, time off to rejuvenate, and a system (balance buddies) to support one another around simple self-care needs, e.g., drinking water, going for walks, checking in when needed. When staff feel cared for and seen, they are in turn, more able to model and engage youth in relationships that center inquiry, connection, and healing.



3. Make a Radical Equity Shift

“To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.”

—bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*

Adults within restorative districts and schools strive to be high implementers of RJ and racial justice. A restorative approach requires us to make radical shifts in thinking and being. Deep engagement around issues of implicit bias and institutional racism is necessary to ensure that RJ values are not just stated but are embodied. RJ implementation must include training, reflective practice, and ongoing support related to implicit bias.

Implicit Bias

This unwavering desire to ensure the best for children is precisely why educators should become aware of the concept of implicit bias: the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Operating outside of our conscious awareness, implicit biases are pervasive, and they can challenge even the most well-intentioned and egalitarian-minded individuals, resulting in actions and outcomes that do not necessarily align with explicit intentions. ²⁶

“All adults at a school site, including those in the chain of decision-making that leads to racially disparate outcomes, do not only need quality RJ training, coaching, and mentoring. They also need rigorous and continuous equality training to develop a more nuanced awareness of structural and institutional racism, learn how they personally reproduce structural inequalities through individual bias, and explore strategies to unlearn it.”²⁷

OUSD has embraced racial justice as foundational to RJ. Racial justice values come out of the legacy of radical social movements led by the Black Panthers and an explicit decision to centralize notions of justice rooted in equity. One of the district’s earliest partners in this work was Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY). RJOY “works from an anti-racist, anti-bias lens to promote institutional shifts toward restorative approaches.”²⁸ OUSD’s school-wide implementation guide highlights the need for schools to adopt a social justice analysis. Implicit bias is pervasive, yet research and experience, both in education and other fields, have shown that implicit bias can be overcome when race is talked about instead of ignored. OUSD highlights the importance of holding circles for adults to explore their feelings about race and other areas of implicit bias. This self-reflective and preventive work is deeply important and foundational to ensuring that when there is conflict or things get difficult, there is an awareness about how implicit bias may impact the resolution of these issues.

El Cerrito High School’s James Moorehouse Project (JMP) supports school-wide initiatives, such as restorative practices, in addition to providing physical and behavioral health services, and youth development. Over four years ago, in trying to fully embody the values of RJ - the right that each person needs to be seen and known on their own terms – staff practiced deep and reflective listening with

²⁶ Understanding Implicit Bias: What Educators Should Know by Cheryl Staats <https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/staats>

²⁷ <https://www.salon.com/2019/04/21/these-schools-use-restorative-justice-to-remedy-racial-disparities-in-discipline/>

²⁸ <https://rjoyoakland.org/about-us/>

young people. It became clear, through ongoing and repeated conversations, that young people, and most often young people of color, did not feel seen or known by the staff in the school. These youth shared their experience of structural racism in the classroom with teachers who were often unaware of perpetuating racist stereotypes. This was having a dramatic effect on their ability to learn, often unintentionally pushing them to the margins. The staff at JMP became intentional about how they could involve more school staff in this conversation. How could they bring race forward, in an environment where race is rarely talked about?

Since then, staff and young people have been given voluntary opportunities to engage in conversations with their peers about critical race theory, issues of implicit bias, internalized racism, and white privilege. JMP formed race and equity groups for young people, with many opportunities to engage in these issues. Young people, particularly students of color, have expressed a desire to talk about these issues and an appreciation for having a safe space to do so. Simultaneously, staff have been invited to participate in a monthly, hour-and-a-half, after school gathering, and have committed to at least one monthly check-in with a partner about how these issues show up in their instruction. Reading materials are often used as a jumping off point for conversation.²⁹ Educators often say they don't know how to talk about race and don't feel they have the skills to do it; and, therefore, these groups have been a very important support in their learning. A few times a year, the two groups come together, and young people are given an opportunity to share with staff their experiences in the school and what is needed for them to be more fully seen and understood.

San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE), with the support and collaboration of CircleUp and the Get Healthy San Mateo grant from the San Mateo County Office of Public Health, has been introducing RJ practices to all their partnering districts. As part of the impetus of this work, SMCOE launched its RESPECT! 24/7 anti-bullying initiative after a San Mateo County Grand Jury report called on the county's school districts to update their anti-bullying policies to be more comprehensive and consistent. RESPECT! 24/7 was created and integrated with SMCOE's social-emotional learning and wellness efforts, e.g., RJ Practices and Trauma-Informed Schools. SMCOE's point of entry for RJ practices was the disparity highlighted in discipline and attendance data, which got leadership's attention and sense of urgency. Often, leadership would jump to RJ practices as an alternative to discipline, with a focus on harm circles. However, SMCOE, has guided the leadership to understand that the response to these disparities should not only be to address discipline, but also for schools to reflect on the root causes, which are often connected to issues of implicit bias and racism. In order to support this work, SMCOE used their annual RESPECT! 24/7 full-day professional development for districts to feature speakers from CircleUp who energized the participants with a focus on cultural humility and implicit bias as the foundation for RJ. This partnership helped make it possible for interested districts to hold the dual focus on alternatives to discipline and implicit bias and equity work. These conversations are not easy, but they are necessary when approaching RJ implementation.

²⁹ Materials by Kenneth V. Hardy

<https://teachingwhilewhite.org/blog/2019/6/21/a-letter-to-white-teachers-of-my-black-children>

Material by Robin D'Angelo

4. Lay a Strong Foundation: Culture and Climate

“Restorative justice is not one more thing on the plate, it IS the plate”

– Amani Dunham, SLzUSD

Restorative Justice is a powerful tool for school transformation because it fundamentally shifts a community from one that pushes people out to one that creates belonging, centering relationships, and preservation of community. This shift impacts everything in the school’s community, from culture and climate, to teaching strategies. While RJ can be organized and implemented across the three tiers described in the introduction, laying a foundation strong enough to sustain a new way of operating requires focusing on Tier I - universal prevention-based efforts that build community and relationships – for a sustained period.

The focus in Tier I should be to deepen the school community’s understanding of what RJ is, through trainings, support, and feedback. Tier I work emphasizes training and coaching the entire school community – teachers, counselors, administrators, school security officers, support staff, afterschool program and other partner staff – on having and/or facilitating restorative conversations and community building circles. Teachers and young people should be given the time and opportunity to be in community building circles together. Training, support, and feedback on the creation and implementation of a community building circle template is an important and necessary step in the Tier I phase. Staff must have time to practice and grow comfortable using restorative questions. Community building circles and restorative conversations create more inclusive and safe environments for learning and growth. The trust that is built during this time, across the overall school community, creates the foundation for the more challenging work, which emerges when schools move toward the RJ implementation of Tiers 2 and 3.

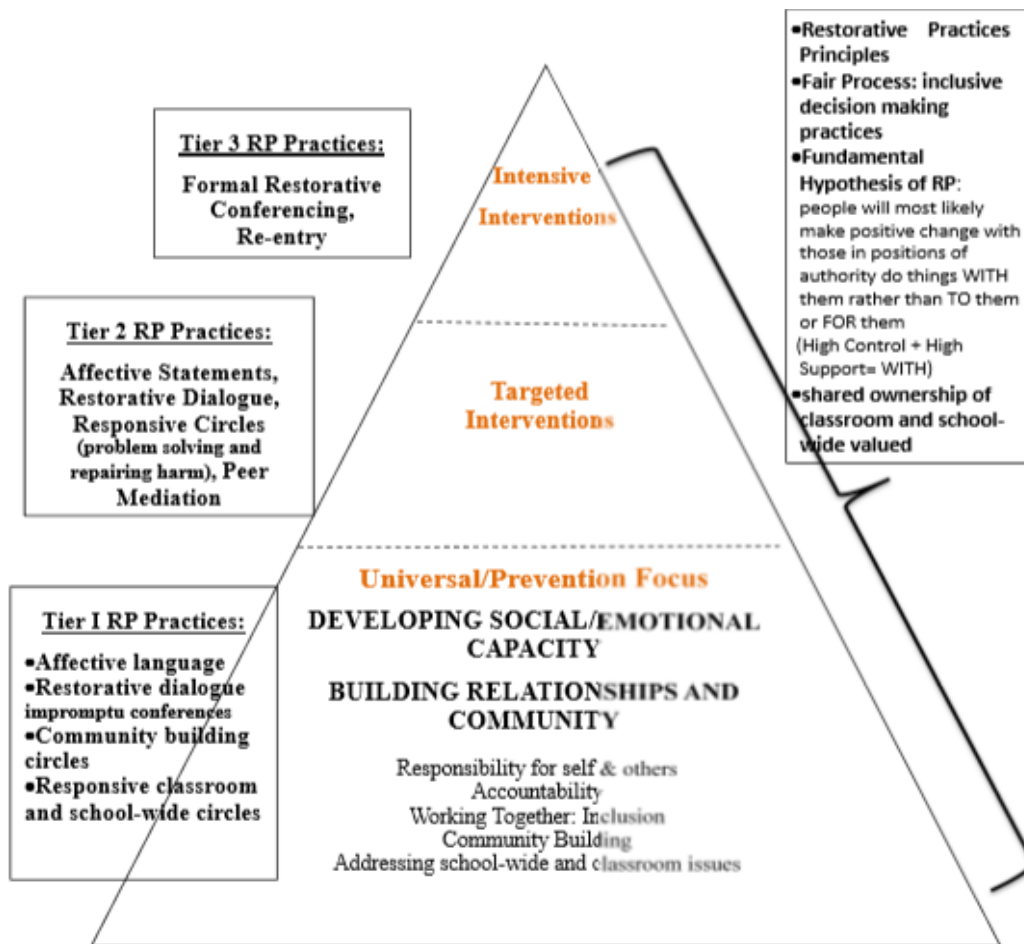
OUSD’s *Restorative Justice Implementation Guide: A Whole School Approach*, shares a tip: “A good rule of thumb is that about 20 percent of a school’s restorative practices respond to conflict, while 80 percent are proactively creating shared cultures and building strong relationships. This approach cultivates a climate where destructive responses to conflict are less likely to occur.”³⁰

SFUSD’s *Whole School Implementation Guide* describes Tier I restorative practices as those which are universal or prevention focused. The key competencies to be developed through these Tier I practices are developing social and emotional capacity and building relationships and communities.

As part of Tier I work, the commitment to a new way of thinking and being requires us to look at our current school climate and ask the question: *Are we invested in creating healthier school environments with our community, not to our community?* Districts and schools must do a deep dive into their own culture and climate. Each classroom, school site, and district is its own micro-community with specific needs. RJ implementation planning includes developing an understanding and appreciation for the current culture and climate. How do staff, kids, and family members feel when they are in these communities? What changes need to happen in order to increase a sense of safety and belonging? How do we create environments where students and staff are able to learn and thrive? Those interviewed spoke about the importance of taking time to look at, and reflect on, what information and data is available related to culture and climate. This is also a time to gather new information, which may be missing.

30 <https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/134/BTC-OUSD1-IG-08b-web.pdf>

Figure 3. SFUSD Restorative Practices Multiple Tiered System of Supports



For example, OUSD’s implementation guide speaks about the need to analyze and understand data collected through mechanisms such as: California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS); behavioral incident summaries or reports (office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions); and Coordination of Services Team (COST) referrals. Similarly, SEEDS’ *Blue Print for Restorative Justice Implementation in Schools* suggests that districts or schools “conduct a survey, participate in classroom observations, and hold focus groups with representatives from all parts of the school community – students, teachers, support staff, volunteers, para-professionals, non-duty staff, community partners, and caregivers. Explore both the formal and informal practices that guide relationship and interactions in your school community.”³¹ Districts and school sites can also develop a task force or build on existing team (such as a Culture and Climate Team) to look at key data, explore district or school-shared values via staff surveys, hold focus groups, and complete district-wide and school-wide assessments.

³¹ SEEDS: Introduction to Restorative Justice in Schools: Blue Print for Restorative Justice Implementation in Schools, 2019

CircleUp Education

CircleUp partners with districts interested in implementing restorative practices. Their point of entry is varied and dependent on the needs of the district. CircleUp encourages district/school sites to start by assessing their overall school climate. This can be done by exploring data, such as California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and district dashboards – by reflecting on what has and has not worked in the past, and by collecting input from staff and students. Once the needs of the district have been established, CircleUp works closely with each school site to understand their unique culture and the historical background of that school; past staff trainings and the purpose behind them; initiatives that have or are currently happening; and what, if any, their shared values and principles are. CircleUp also encourage sites to have all staff complete a 30-question staff climate survey with questions such as: Are conflicts among staff always resolved? or Is there trust among staff? To assess barriers to implementation. CircleUp sometimes leads focus groups with young people about their sense of the overall school/district climate.

Once this information has been gathered and shared with the team, a variety of steps can follow. One partner school decided to create a culture and climate team, do a deeper dive into the data CircleUp had collected and shared, and then start to tackle root causes. They asked themselves questions: How do we get to the root causes of staff dissatisfaction and lack of cohesion in a strategic way that doesn't require a lot of extra time or work? How can we use restorative practices to strengthen our adult culture and relationships?

The first thing they reflected on was how little time staff had to get to know each other in meaningful ways. They decided to move staff meetings from the auditorium to the staff cafeteria where staff could sit at tables together; time was set aside at the beginning and end of each meeting for a short but intentional community building restorative practice. These small, but intentional changes had a positive impact on the way staff felt within their school community. It was an important first step toward improving adult relationships and creating a healthier adult culture, which young people will learn from and emulate. It also paved the way for deeper RP work, such as community-building classroom circles, which followed.

Tips for Laying a Strong Foundation

Tip #1: It's Okay to Fail

Practitioners discussed how all types of circles (i.e., community building, harm, and re-entry circles) go badly from time to time—and it's important to remember: it's okay to fail. They stressed the importance of being prepared for this type of “failure” and the necessity to dedicate time after circles to reflect on what went wrong. OUSD has created two documents on this subject, *Circle Keeper Reflection Sheet* and *Circle Challenges: When Good Circles Go Bad*.

Tip #2: Successful Harm Circles Require a Restorative Culture

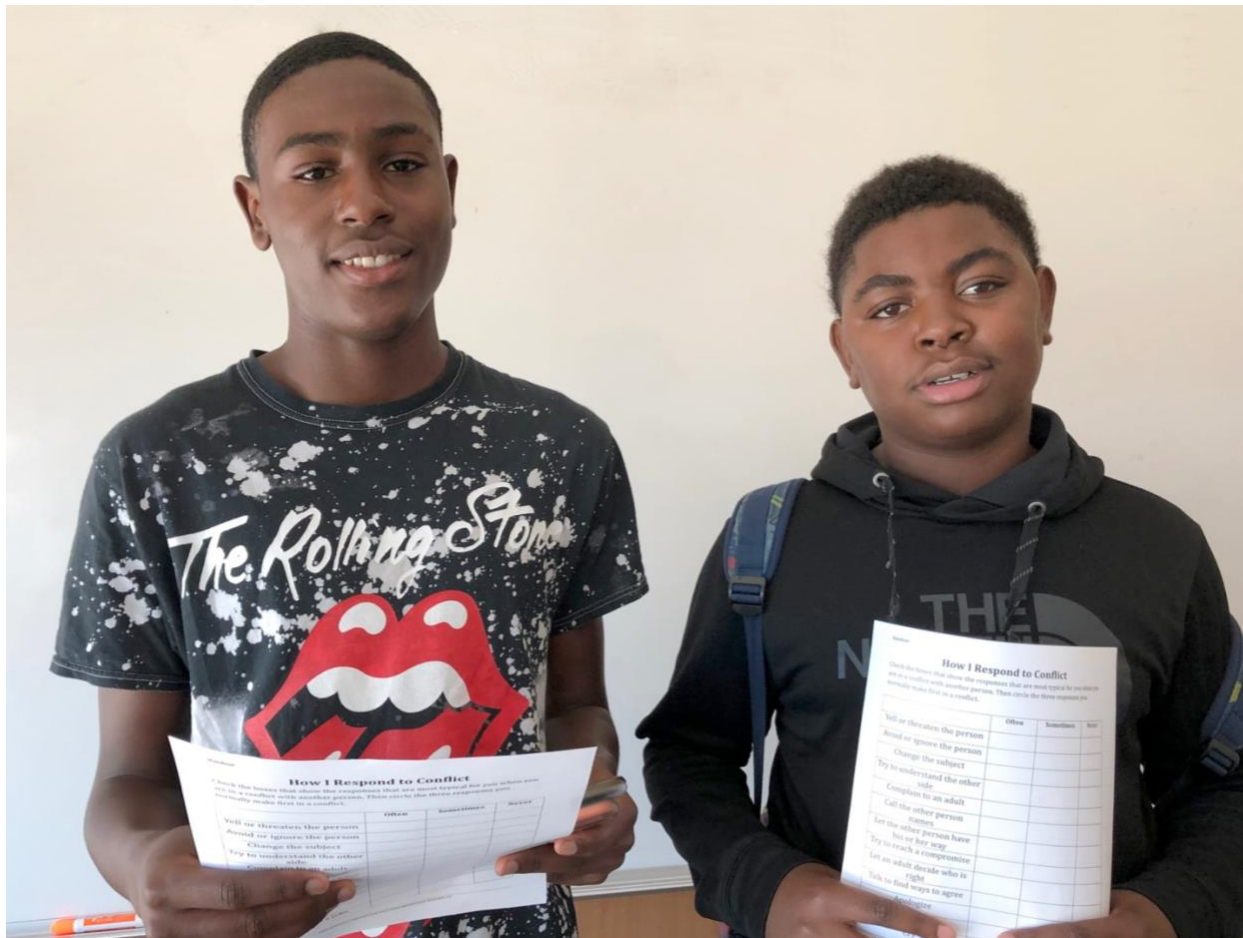
In the context of schools, RJ has often been embraced by school districts as an “alternative to suspension.” This has largely come as a response to the crisis of over-disciplining and criminalizing black and brown children, sometimes referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. While interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline should be a major priority for all school districts, many districts make the mistake of investing only in “alternatives to suspensions,” such as using harm circles in place of suspensions. When this is the point of entry for RJ, it is not sustainable or successful without also working on building a more relational and restorative culture. RJ practitioners constantly stressed that the single most important first step in addressing issues of disproportionate discipline is to look at the overall culture and climate of a school community. Without insight and attention given to the impacts of implicit bias, and authoritative ways of thinking and being, schools may decrease their suspension rates but marginalized students will still be over-represented in the discipline system because the root causes of this over-representation will go unaddressed.

5. Integrate with Other Priorities and Initiatives

It is critical that Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices are integrated into the district's priorities and into existing school structures and practices.

Reflecting on the district's current initiatives, and creating opportunities for partnership and alignment, is essential to RJ implementation. First, it helps staff and the school community see that thoughtful planning is taking place in terms of integration with other initiatives and school change efforts. It also creates opportunities for partnerships with other departments and groups of people, which can enhance and deepen RJ practices.

SFUSD prioritized integration and alignment of RP with their key school climate initiative – Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). They described it as PBIS providing a framework for positive school climate, and RP being concrete practices within that framework. SFUSD created a Restorative Practices Tiered Fidelity Inventory Workbook to evaluate alignment between RJ and PBIS.³² The purpose of the workbook is to provide a valid, reliable, and efficient measure of the extent to which school staff are applying the core features of school-wide RP and school-wide PBIS. The workbook is intended to guide both initial implementation and sustained use of RP and PBIS and is used at all stages of implementation.



³² The SFUSD document was modified from an original version from PBIS, to fit the unique needs of SFUSD - <https://www.pbis.org/resource/rfi>

SFUSD's Tiered Fidelity Inventory Workbook – Aligning Restorative Practices and PBIS

In the 2018-2019 school year, SFUSD began using the Restorative Practices Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) at five, self-selected, elementary and middle schools in the district. Only one school ended up using the tool throughout the entire year, and this was largely driven by the school administration and parent community's interest in seeing more data on RP's effectiveness.

Before the TFI was ever introduced, this site had already done a significant amount of pre-work which involved creating time for staff to reflect on their own beliefs about discipline and punishment and how that shapes the culture within their classrooms. By the time RP was introduced to the wider school community, the staff had already had time to wrestle with the complex issues that arise when a school is attempting to shift culture. After the completion of the first TFI, the results were shared with a variety of stakeholders within the school (staff, parents, and partners). Based on the results, two action items were prioritized: 1) To ensure that all staff at the site were trained on the values and practices of RJ; and 2) That concrete support would be given to teachers for incorporating community and academic learning circles into their daily instruction. District RP staff provided teachers with a variety of tools, templates, and approaches to support integration of RP and instruction. Staff who had been the most vocal in their skepticism became receptive to RP once they started experiencing the benefits of integrating the practices into academic rigor. That year, a great deal of time was dedicated to training and supporting staff in RP implementation; in fact, six of their nine professional development minimum days were dedicated to RP. The TFI was completed again at the end of the school year and, while there were not big statistical impacts across the entire TFI, the school saw great gains in their priority areas. Also, this school had seen years of high teacher turnover (as much as 50%) but, going into the 2019-2020 school year, this site saw a major increase in teacher retention, with 70% of teachers returning from the previous year.

For the 2019-20 school year, the school board is requiring sites to prioritize the gathering of more evidence on RP implementation. As a result, 122 schools are expected to complete the first five features of the RP TFI, and 15 features of the PBIS TFI, both focused on Tier 1 implementation.

OUSD is another example of district-level integration, in this case, of RJ and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) work. The RJ district team looked for opportunities to partner with other departments and offer teachers ways to incorporate RJ that would be supportive and connected to the work they were already doing in their classrooms. The partnership with the SEL department eventually led to the creation of highly effective tools, such as Figure 4, *SEL in Circle*. The purpose of this tool was to offer something accessible and relatable that teachers would use. Staff were given the *SEL in Circle* posters and *Circle a Day* ring of cards following their participation in a training led by the RJ or SEL departments. The feedback from staff about these tools has been very positive. Besides being used by teachers and students in the classroom, they are often used to start meetings in the district's central office. Tools such as these have helped shift the district culture, while solidifying the integration of RJ values and practices.

OUSD is another example of district-level integration, in this case, of RJ and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) work. The RJ district team looked for opportunities to partner with other departments and to offer teachers ways to incorporate RJ that would be supportive and connected to the work they were already doing in their classrooms. The partnership with the SEL department eventually led to the creation of highly effective tools, such as the one shown below, *SEL in Circle*. The purpose of this tool was to offer something accessible and relatable that teachers would use. Staff were given the *SEL in Circle* posters and *Circle a Day* ring of cards following their participation in a training led by the RJ or SEL departments. The feedback from staff about these tools has been very positive. Teachers and students use them in the classroom; and they are often used to start meetings in the district's central office. These materials have also helped shift the district culture, while solidifying the integration of RJ values and practices.

Figure 4. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Circle

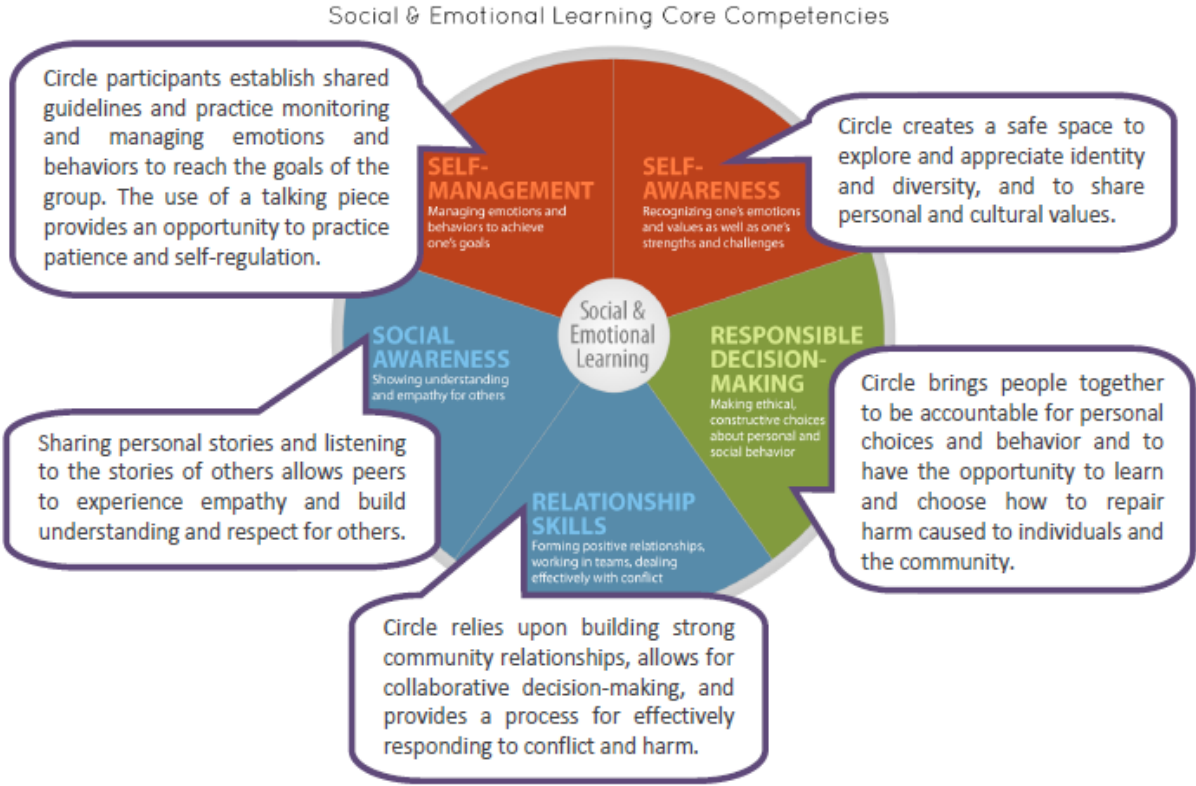
PEER RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM GUIDE

Social Emotional Learning

How restorative practices encourage social emotional learning competencies based in the work of the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). Visit CASEL.org for more information about the five core competencies.

SEL in Circle

When people are given the opportunity to build positive relationships using restorative practices that encourage social emotional learning (SEL) and skill building, they are more likely to engage in the difficult conversations around harm, accountability, and healing that is at the heart of the restorative justice process. Restorative practices provide a process for learning about and practicing CASEL’s five SEL competencies.



6. Build and Maintain Support and Commitment

Implementing RJ practices is a change initiative; adults and students alike are being asked to embrace a relationship-centered and restorative approach in the context of a punitive society. That makes it fundamentally different from many of the other initiatives undertaken by school districts, such as rolling out a new curriculum or policy. Therefore, the issue of developing staff supports and leadership for RJ is essential for success.

Regardless of a district's implementation approach, or even how far into the process they are, it is important to think strategically about how to build interest and ongoing support about RJ values and practices. This is true in the early stages, as people are grappling with understanding RJ and how it can work in a school setting. It is also true in well-established RJ schools, with the inevitable turnover of staff and the challenges experienced in circle processes. People's belief in RJ will be tested by circles that feel like failures and by frustration, which can build, when some spaces within a school community are operating restoratively and some are not.

All the practitioners interviewed emphasized how much strategizing and effort has gone into introducing staff to the concepts, and then building support for the effort. Here are some the concrete strategies.

Outreach and Marketing Materials

All district practitioners stressed the importance of RJ visibility and “marketing” RJ. They shared examples of RJ guidelines posters; printed cards with restorative questions; and RJ district logo sweatshirts, t-shirts, and bags. These things build excitement and increase the general awareness of RJ. When people at a school site or district office see staff sporting RJ gear, it increases curiosity about what RJ is, and how to participate. Each district we spoke with had created and disseminated district-specific materials which were put up in classrooms, school hallways, and district offices. These materials help identify the school community with RJ values.

Exposure and Experiential Learning

Exposing staff to the practices and principles of RJ is an important way to get staff engaged in RJ early on. Those we interviewed stressed the need to create opportunities for staff to learn about RJ through direct practice and experience, even if they or their schools were not yet ready to begin implementation. Experiential learning can happen in a variety of ways, such as:

- Regular district-wide trainings that are open to all staff and provide an experience of being in circle.
- Encouraging staff members to invite colleagues to participate in their classroom circles. This allows staff who are hesitant, skeptical, or unfamiliar with RJ to see the process and experience it, without having to be the facilitator. It also gives them an opportunity to see what is needed to accommodate a classroom into a circle space.
- Have RP facilitators, teachers, Champions, youth facilitators, etc. lead community building circles in classes of interested teachers, with the idea of building familiarity and comfort.

Restorative Practice Ambassadors

As RJ is introduced within a school community, it is important to consider how staff interest and enthusiasm will be directed. Cultivating RJ Champions is an important part of successful RJ implementation.

SLzUSD's on-boarding process includes the development of site-based restorative practice Teacher Leaders, or Ambassadors. As part of the district-wide staff training and ongoing support, teachers (all voluntary) are offered the opportunity to be RP Teacher Leaders. This role is primarily focused on RP capacity building at a school site. Participating teachers describe the unique benefits of participating in and learning from a K-12 professional learning community (PLC), the only opportunity like this in the district. Staff who take on this role:

- Receive a stipend.
- Participate in a monthly RP PLC and receive classroom coverage during those times.
- Receive three days of release time either for RP professional development or RP planning.
- Work with school site leadership to lead or co-lead professional development trainings on RP.
- Participate in, or start, a culture and climate committee at their school site.
- Lead classroom community building circles and create opportunities for other staff to participate in them.
- Support staff who wish to do community building circles in their classrooms in planning, implementation, and reflection.

Conclusion

Restorative Justice has the power to transform school communities and improve outcomes for students and educators alike. We recognize that creating the space to be intentional around implementing RJ in school districts can be difficult and daunting given the many, often competing, demands on a school's time and resources. The stories shared in this brief, and supported by years of research in the field, reinforce our belief that, though transformation to a restorative approach is complex, it is a powerful lever for addressing inequities and building healthy, resilient students and schools. This brief seeks to provide useful guidance in launching, strengthening, and sustaining RJ efforts in schools. Restorative approaches offer a pathway for creating school cultures and climates that are truly welcoming and support ALL students' academic and social emotional development. Our young people and the educators who support them deserve it.

"When I'm in a circle, I feel opened up. The circle is a part of me treating people better because I see how people are when people open up, and I see how they're treated, and I know I wouldn't want nobody to treat me like that... You don't need nobody to tell you to stop, you know if you're right or wrong."

— OUSD student in RJ program