

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Doctor of Education Dissertations

College of Education

Spring 2022

An Evaluation of the Implementation and Impact of Restorative Practices in a Small, Rural District

Carla Miller

Gardner-Webb University, cmiller22@gardner-webb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations>



Part of the [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Miller, Carla, "An Evaluation of the Implementation and Impact of Restorative Practices in a Small, Rural District" (2022). *Doctor of Education Dissertations*. 92.

<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations/92>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF
RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN A SMALL, RURAL DISTRICT

By
Carla Miller

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2021

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Carla Miller under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Bruce Boyles, EdD
Committee Chair

Date

Dale Ellis, EdD
Committee Member

Date

Stephen Laws, EdD
Committee Member

Date

Prince Bull, PhD
Dean of the College of Education

Date

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior for giving me strength. So many days, I clung to Philippians 4:13, knowing that I could do ALL things through Him and that my strength comes only through and by Him.

I owe a deep sense of gratitude to my wonderful momma, who always encouraged me to pursue my dreams. She instilled in me a love of learning and taught me to never give up and always give my all. Without those life skills she taught, none of this would have been possible. I know she would be so proud. I only wish she was here to witness this accomplishment.

My precious family deserves all the kudos possible. Alton, I know I would not have been able to finish this without you. You have been my constant encouragement and taken on so many extra duties to help keep the family going while I was working on the coursework and then the dissertation. You never complained about the late nights or the missed weekends, just kept doing whatever was needed to keep the family going. You are my steady and I know I could not have finished without all your support. To my three precious children, thank you for your unconditional support and your encouragement along the way. Hunter, thanks for helping Dad keep things together. You definitely help keep him grounded, and he would have been lost without you. Maylee, thanks for all the cooking and cleaning. The extra work you took on helped relieve so much stress and provided me with much-needed time to make this possible. I promise no more piles of paper on the kitchen table to clean up! Tillman, thanks for being my company on all those late nights and Saturdays at school. I promise we will start leaving at a decent hour now.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Boyles, Dr. Ellis, and Dr. Laws, thank you for your willingness to serve in this way. Your guidance and feedback have been instrumental in helping me achieve this goal. Dr. Boyles, thank you for sharing your knowledge and experience. Thanks for giving me a push each time I needed it and knowing just when to give an encouraging word. Your calm, gentle spirit has guided me and helped me to progress. Dr. Ellis, thank you for believing in me and for your willingness to help. Thank you for helping me to see this was possible and for talking me through and answering my many questions. Your guidance was invaluable.

Thanks to Lyndsey for being my carpool buddy and roomie on all those long weekends. Thanks for the periodic check-ins to make sure I hadn't quit! You were always willing and enthusiastic to help and always had a listening ear. So glad the paths of our lives crossed.

There are far too many who deserve thanks to list them all. If you in any way helped me along this journey, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Abstract

AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN A SMALL, RURAL DISTRICT. Miller, Carla, 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This study examined the use of restorative practices in one school district. As examined in this study, restorative practices are defined as processes that precede wrongdoing in an attempt to prevent discipline offenses from occurring and processes used to respond once an offense has occurred. The purpose of the study was to examine teacher perceptions of restorative practice implementation and to examine the impacts of the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural district. Gaining insight into successful implementation practices will assist districts that intend to implement restorative practices as an alternative to suspension. Further, knowledge gained from this study equipped the district of focus with needed information to move forward with additional restorative practice initiatives. Study results provided data allowing the district to examine the impact of restorative practice implementation. Teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices revealed strong district implementation with high teacher confidence levels, high levels of leadership support, and positive perceptions of the impact on student behavior and the culture/climate of district schools. In addition, district data were examined, including attendance and discipline data. Data revealed multiple positive impacts of restorative practice implementation including a statistically significant change in overall attendance rate, a decrease in the number of days of instruction lost due to suspension, decreased numbers of out-of-school suspensions, and a decrease in the number of repeat offenders. The study revealed strong district

implementation of restorative practices with multiple positive results.

Keywords: alternatives to suspension, restorative practices, attendance improvement, teacher perceptions of restorative practices

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
An Overview of the Research Problem	1
Statement of the Research Problem	6
Deficiencies in the Evidence	8
Audience	9
Purpose of the Study	9
Definition of Terms	9
Research Questions	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
Overview	12
Conceptual Framework	17
Aspects of Restorative Practices	19
Benefits of Restorative Practices	22
Restorative Practice Implementation Issues	31
Suggestions for Successful Restorative Practice Implementation	32
Need for Further Research	34
Research Questions	34
Chapter 3: Methodology	35
Research Questions	35
Context	35
Sampling Technique	42
Instrumentation	43
Data Collection Procedures	44
Participants	44
Data Sources	45
Data Analysis	46
Ethical Considerations	48
Summary	48
Chapter 4: Results	50
Description of Sample	50
Research Question 1	51
Research Question 2	63
Summary of Results	73
Chapter 5: Discussion	75
Overview	75
Summary of Results and Major Findings	76
Implications	82
Limitations	88
Recommendations for Future Evaluation and Research	90
Conclusion	91
References	94
Appendices	
A Survey	102
B Survey Permission	111

C	District Permission.....	113
Tables		
1	Demographics for the District of Focus.....	36
2	Most Significant Challenges With Restorative Practice Implementation.....	58
3	Mean and Standard Deviation Attendance Rates.....	64
4	Results of Paired Sample t Test of Attendance Rates.....	65
5	Mean and Standard Deviation of Attendance Rates by Gender	65
6	Mean and Standard Deviation of Attendance Rates by Race/Ethnicity	67
7	Mean and Standard Deviation of Unique Offenders.....	68
8	Discipline Unique Offenders	69
9	Paired Sample t Test of Discipline Offenders.....	69
10	Mean and Standard Deviation of Instructional Days Lost.....	70
11	Discipline Days Lost.....	70
12	Number of Repeat Offenders	71
13	Discipline Repeat Offenders by Gender and Ethnicity.....	72
14	Paired Sample t Test of Repeat Offenders	73

Chapter 1: Introduction

Educational experts have expressed concern about using suspension and expulsion as a disciplinary practice for students. The American Academy of Pediatrics points to a growing body of evidence that suspension is ineffective, inequitable and leads to multiple harmful effects for students (Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013). Students being excluded from school precipitates escalation in delinquent behaviors, increased drop-out rates, increased juvenile justice system involvement, increased probability of repeating a grade, and increased arrest rates (Balfanz et al., 2014; Fabelo et al., 2011; Mittleman, 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Paget et al., 2017). In response to the negative impacts of punitive discipline, restorative practices in United States schools have grown substantially (Gonzalez, 2012). School districts must look for solutions to discipline issues that do not involve suspension.

An Overview of the Research Problem

In the 1970s, suspending students from school was uncommon. In 1973, less than 4% of students were suspended (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Since the 1980s, school discipline has mirrored the justice system's treatment of offenders with punishment required for offenses. In the 1990s, the Gun Free Schools Act and the Columbine High School mass shooting in 1999 precipitated zero tolerance policies (Marsh, 2017), mounting apprehension about violence and crime encouraged districts and states to initiate guidelines requiring students to be suspended. Since the 1970s and the implementation of zero tolerance policies, the suspension rate has almost doubled (Nelson & Lind, 2015). In 1974, 1.7 million students were suspended. In 2000, 3.1 million students were suspended (Gonzalez, 2012). These policies clearly sparked an

increase in suspension. Zero tolerance policies increased the severity of punishment and the number of students receiving those punishments (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Receiving out of school suspensions makes students more likely to be pushed out of school and become active participants with the judicial system (Fabelo et al., 2011; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2014). Being pushed out of school has been termed the school-to-prison pipeline. Kirn (2020) defined the school-to-prison pipeline as a failure of the education system where

students of color, students with disabilities and LGBTQ students are disproportionately disciplined more harshly, including referral to law enforcement for minimal misbehavior; achieve at lower levels; and eventually drop or are pushed out of school, often into juvenile justice facilities and prison. (p. 1)

There is no data confirming these policies precipitated a positive impact on school safety (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Another issue with school suspension is the amount of instructional time lost. According to national data released in May 2020, out-of-school suspensions led to an instructional loss of 11,392,474 days during the 2015-2016 school year (Losen & Martinez, 2020). In a report released by Losen and Martinez (2020), the raw data from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) was converted to years of instruction, equating to a learning deficit of 62,596 years. For the first time, the report illuminated the effects of instructional loss due to out of school suspension for all student groups in all districts nationwide. Data revealed “deeply disturbing disparities and demonstrate how the frequent use of suspension contributes to inequities in the opportunity to learn” (Losen & Martinez, 2020, p. 3). The most significant findings from this study include the

following:

- Across all grades, out-of-school suspension resulted in an average of 23 days of instruction lost per 100 days.
- At the secondary level, in multiple districts, students experienced instructional loss of more than a year (per 100 students enrolled).
- In alternative schools, students experienced inordinately high, deeply disturbing and disparate rates of instructional loss.
- Although required by federal law, multiple districts failed to report police involvement at school. Data revealed, zero school-related arrests in over 60% of the biggest school districts across the country (including Los Angeles and New York City). “The prevalence of zeros suggests that much of the school-policing data from 2015–2016 required by the federal Office of Civil Rights were incomplete or missing” (Losen & Martinez, 2020, p. 3). In June 2019, the USDOE, Office of Civil Rights (2019) finalized its data collection from the 2017–2018 school year. As of August 6, 2020, no new data have been reported to the public by the USDOE.
- Due to out-of-school suspensions, secondary students experience instructional loss at a rate five times higher than elementary students. Unique to this report, the data was disaggregated by school level, elementary and secondary, and by national and state levels. Data was included for almost every district in the country. “It also demonstrates how the traditional form of reporting the data for all grades, K–12, obscures the highest rates and largest disparities” (Losen & Martinez, 2020, p. 3).

Students who are not in school due to suspension lose valuable days of instruction and learning. These lost days equate to multiple disadvantages for children. A report by the USDOE (2019), *Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools*, listed multiple issues with absences. Absences prevent children from reaching early learning milestones. Further, poor attendance has been connected to negative outcomes later in life including poverty, diminished health, and increased probability of criminal justice system involvement. In addition, irregular attendance provides better prediction of dropout than test scores (USDOE, 2019).

In addition to the negative impacts of suspension, suspensions are distributed inequitably with students with learning disabilities and students of color in contrast to their White peers. An imbalance of students of color with regard to suspensions and expulsions has been the emphasis of recent racial equity research (Morris & Perry, 2016). In the nationwide Losen and Martinez (2020) report, when examining rates of instructional loss due to suspension, large disparities exist. Disparities were most pronounced at the middle and high school level including:

- Black students had an instructional loss of 103 days per 100 students enrolled as a result of out-of-school suspension, 82 days more than their White peers.
- With the second highest rate, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students experienced an instructional loss of 63 days per 100 students enrolled.
- Native American students experienced an instructional loss of 54 days per 100 students enrolled.
- Students with disabilities lost 68 days per 100 students enrolled, twice as much as students without disabilities (Losen & Martinez, 2020, p. 4).

Even larger disparities exist when considering race combined with gender as follows:

- Black males had the highest rate with 132 days of instructional loss for every 100 students enrolled.
- Black females had the second highest rate with 77 days of instructional loss for every 100 students enrolled, a rate seven times more than the loss experienced by White females (Losen & Martinez, 2020, p. 4).
- When compared to White students, states with the largest racial gaps included Missouri, North Carolina and New Hampshire. In North Carolina, Native American students lost 102 more days than White students. In Missouri, Black students experienced 162 more instructional days lost than White students. In New Hampshire, Latinx students had 75 more instructional days lost than their White peers. Secondary students with disabilities had the highest disparities in Delaware, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. In every state, students with disabilities lost more instructional time due to suspensions than their nondisabled peers (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Further, suspensions create burdensome fiscal and social costs. In a report by the UCLA Civil Rights Project, the most recent nationwide suspension rate of 16% was estimated to cost society \$35.74 billion (Rumberger & Losen, 2016). The costs were calculated considering factors linked to absenteeism and school dropout. Those who do not earn their high school diploma earn less money, pay fewer taxes, are less likely to have health insurance, have a higher probability for long-term health issues, are more likely to have trouble with the law creating costs to society for court and prison, and have a higher probability of reliance on public assistance (Rumberger & Losen, 2016).

Statement of the Research Problem

The practice of excluding students from school persists despite evidence that suspensions do not improve student behavior (Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion, 2013), evidence of increased fiscal and social costs to society (Rumberger & Losen, 2016), evidence of long-term negative life outcomes for students (USDOE, Office of Civil Rights, 2019), and evidence of disparate inequities for racial minorities and students with disabilities (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Children are experiencing adverse personal impacts due to suspension, and increasingly, school districts are searching for a solution to mitigate the negative consequences of suspension and address the inequities that exist. One approach to addressing adverse student behavior, restorative justice, is unique because the focus is not on punishment for misbehavior. The focus is on building relationships and repairing the harm caused by wrongdoing. Schools that implement restorative practices not only look for ways to react when offenses occur but also look for ways to prevent wrongdoing (Gonzalez, 2020). Rather than focusing on punishment, restorative practice focuses on repairing the harm done to the school community, righting the wrong, and reconciling the offender with the school community. Unlike punitive discipline that tends to separate victims and offenders, restorative justice includes everyone involved in a discipline incident, seeking to create a comfortable place for conversation and a safe place to collaboratively create a solution to the discipline problem (Marsh, 2017). Restorative solutions are guided by the following questions: “What happened? Who was harmed? What would help to repair the harm” (Stern, 2020, para. 12)? In addition, restorative practices emphasize accountability, restitution, and restoration (Gonzalez, 2012).

Restorative practice is an alternative approach to discipline with roots in indigenous communities where the concept of justice relies on the communal value that all members of the community are connected to one another and their community (Marsh, 2017). Restorative measures focus on the harm done to the community and what actions the offender should take to repair the harm done. Restorative practices have been utilized in the juvenile judicial system with results showing a reduction in future crime when both the offender and victims were willing to participate in restorative conferences (Anyon et al., 2016).

Most literature indicates restorative practices was first used in school in Queensland, Australia. An assault took place at a school-sponsored event and a restorative conference was held (Fronius et al., 2019). Following the initial implementation in Queensland, restorative practices were widely adopted in multiple places including Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and additional European nations, then in Canada and the United States (Fronius et al., 2019).

Districts are implementing restorative justice practices for several reasons. Restorative practices, implemented in the United States and abroad, have shown promise for decreasing suspensions and the discipline equity gap. Multiple studies show numerous positive impacts of restorative practices including a drop in the number of out-of-school suspensions (Armour, 2014; Augustine et al., 2018; Carroll, 2017; Gonzalez, 2012; Gregory et al., 2018; Katic, 2017; Mansfield et al., 2016), decreased number of office referrals (Goldys, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016), school climate improvement (Augustine et al., 2018), and improved racial disparities in discipline data (Augustine et al., 2018; Gonzalez, 2012).

Despite the proven negative impacts and the inequitable distribution of school suspensions, there were still 203,298 short-term suspensions and 23 expulsions reported statewide in North Carolina during the 2018-2019 school year (“Report,” 2020). During the 2012-2013 school year, the district of focus was on the state of North Carolina’s list of the top 10 schools with the most suspensions. In response to the data, the district began to examine discipline practices and implement alternatives to suspension. District implementation has been informal and gradual. The original focus was on training school administrators on the different aspects of restorative practices. The implementation of restorative practices took place incrementally in all schools in the district.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While restorative practice implementation has substantially increased over the last decade and preliminary research has promising, positive results, peer-reviewed research is still lacking. Research is considerably behind practice, and evaluation assessing the impact of restorative measures in schools is limited. Further, Schiff (2018) stated that much of the research on restorative practices originated in “book chapters, non-peer-reviewed articles, practitioner, governmental or organizational implementation reports rather than rigorous academic research” (p. 126). Many restorative practice studies took place in large, urban school districts. Augustine et al. (2018) examined 44 schools in Pittsburgh, PA; Gonzalez (2012) examined Denver public schools in Colorado; and Gregory et al. (2018) examined Denver public schools. In addition, several studies examined alternative school settings (Carroll, 2017; McCold, 2016). For this study, the district of focus is a small, rural district. The study is important to determine if the benefits of the use of restorative practices hold true for small, rural districts.

Audience

This study will benefit school districts looking for alternatives to suspension or looking to implement restorative practices. School administrators will benefit from additional data related to successful restorative practice implementation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of restorative practice implementation. Gaining insight into successful implementation practices will assist districts that intend to implement restorative practices as an alternative to suspension. Knowledge gained from this study will also equip the district with needed information for moving forward with additional restorative practice initiatives. In addition, the study examined the impacts of restorative practices implementation in a small, rural school district. Study results provided quantitative data, allowing the district to examine the impact of restorative practice implementation on suspension rates and discipline disparity rates.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to provide important knowledge regarding the different components of restorative practice.

Affective Statements

Provide a way to teach students and adults to communicate with each other about positive and negative behaviors and the personal effect of the behavior. They can be utilized to identify positive or negative behaviors, express the emotion associated with the behavior and express the action needed to correct the behavior. They help to build relationships and prevent additional conflict.

Exclusion

Excluding students from school by means of an out-of-school suspension or expulsion.

Expulsion

Suspending students for an extended period of time, sometimes permanently.

Out-of-School Suspension

Temporary removal from school for disciplinary purposes, typically 10 or less days.

Restorative Circles

“A versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively to develop relationships and build community or reactively to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts, and problems” (Wachtel, 2016, p.7). Restorative circles offer a space for students and adults to speak freely and listen to each other.

Restorative Justice

“A broad term that encompasses a growing social movement to institutionalize non-punitive, relationship-centered approaches for avoiding and addressing harm,” and allows participants to “collaboratively solving problems” (Fronius et al., 2019, p.1).

Restorative Practices

The use of processes, both formal and informal, that precede wrongdoing. “A social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making” (Wachtel, 2016, p.1).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Allows both students and adults to gain the knowledge and skills needed to

effectively manage their emotions. Skills taught include being self-aware, setting and achieving personal goals, building and maintaining relationships and making responsible decisions. (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019).

Research Questions

1. What are teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural district?
2. What is the impact of the use of restorative practices in a small, rural district?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

School suspensions and expulsions have lasting detrimental effects on students. A large body of research shows that suspensions are ineffective and have lasting effects on student well-being. Out-of-school suspensions are enormously costly and have proven, unsatisfactory results including increased chronic absenteeism, a higher incidence of high school dropout, involvement in the juvenile justice system, an increased likelihood of being arrested, and engagement in additional inappropriate behaviors (Lamont, 2013; Mittleman, 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2014; Whitford et al., 2016).

Students who are excluded from school are more likely to drop out. To illuminate the magnitude of the relationship between suspensions and deleterious outcomes, Noltemeyer et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis that included 53 cases from 34 studies representing over 7,000 students and over 100 schools. When examining the relationship between achievement and suspension, 42 cases from 24 studies were examined. When examining the relationship between school completion and suspension, 11 cases from 10 studies were included. Over 96% of the cases examined were conducted with U.S. populations. For out-of-school suspensions, a significant positive relationship was evident between dropout rates and overall suspension rates. In examining the data, Noltemeyer et al. found that low-income and urban schools suspend students at considerably greater rates than other schools. This finding suggests that students who already experience an increased risk of dropping out are doubly disadvantaged by their school's use of suspension. Excluding students from the school setting excludes students from instruction needed to progress academically and may initiate student disengagement

which could also result in dropout or poor academic performance (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). In addition, there was a significant inverse relationship between out-of-school suspension and achievement variables; as the rate of out-of-school suspension increased, achievement variables decreased.

Balfanz et al. (2014), in a cohort study of data from 181,897 Florida students, followed ninth-grade students from the 2000-2001 school year until the 2007-2008 school year, examining high school and postsecondary outcomes. Study results showed that students who were suspended once were two times as likely to drop out of high school and twice as likely to be arrested.

Students who are excluded from school are more likely to be arrested. Mittleman (2018) examined data from nearly 5,000 children born in 20 American cities between 1998 and 2000. Data were collected at birth, 1, 3, 5, 9, and 15 years after birth. Mittleman conducted a Year 15 follow-up study which included interviews with teens and their primary caregivers and home visits. Data collection occurred from winter 2014 through fall 2016. Mittleman found 89% of arrested teens had experienced at least one incidence of exclusionary school discipline, and 45% had been suspended by age nine. Suspension marked a turning point in these students' lives, placing them "on a pipeline toward arrest" (Mittleman, 2018, p. 5). Further, students who had been suspended experienced "greater escalation in delinquent behavior between childhood and adolescence" (Mittleman, 2018, p. 5). Children with a childhood suspension were two times as likely to be arrested than those who were not suspended (Mittleman, 2018).

In addition to the negative effects of school suspension, suspensions and expulsions are administered inequitably. As compared to their White counterparts,

students of color are disproportionately suspended and expelled from school. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) collects annual data and measures the impact on equity and opportunity for United States students. The USDOE, Office of Civil Rights (2019) CRDC for 2015-2016 reported that approximately 2.7 million K-12 students received one or more out-of-school suspensions during the 2015-2016 school year. Of the 2.7 million students suspended, Black male students represented 8% of the student population but accounted for 25% of students who received out-of-school suspensions. Black female students represented 8% of the student population but accounted for 14% of students who received out-of-school suspensions. Latino male students represented 13% of the student population but accounted for 15% of students who received out-of-school suspensions, while White male students representing 25% of student enrollment received 24% of the total number of out-of-school suspensions. White female students represented 24% of the total population and 8% of the out-of-school suspensions. Students with disabilities represented 12% of students enrolled and 26% of students who received out-of-school suspensions (USDOE, Office of Civil Rights, 2019).

When examining expulsion data, the CRDC revealed that Black male students represented 8% of the population and accounted for 23% of students expelled. Black female students represented 8% of the student enrollment and 10% of the students who were expelled. Latino male students accounted for 13% of student enrollment but 16% of those expelled. Students with disabilities represented 12% of students enrolled but 24% of those expelled (USDOE, Office of Civil Rights, 2019).

In the Balfanz et al. (2014) study, 39% of Black students were suspended one or more times as compared to 22% of White students. Data also showed that suspension

rates and the number of suspension days are disproportionately higher for poor, Black, and special education students.

One Texas public school study tracked seventh graders for 6 years (Fabelo et al., 2011). Fabelo et al. (2011) examined data from two state agencies, The Texas Education Agency and The Texas Juvenile Probation Commission. Matching data from both data sets, Fabelo et al. was able to locate a school record for 87% of the youth in the juvenile justice database. Using the matched data, Fabelo et al. extracted a study group of three seventh-grade cohorts including nearly one million students. The groups were tracked and data examined for at least eight years. The results of the study included the following findings:

- If a student was suspended or expelled, they had a much higher probability of juvenile justice involvement, 2.85 times more likely.
- Certain sub-groups, specifically students with disabilities and African American students, had a disproportionate probability of being removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons.
- Nearly 75% of students with disabilities were suspended at least one time.
- Students who were excluded from school, especially students with repeated discipline were more likely to drop out of school or be retained.
- As compared to their White counterparts (9.9%), a disproportionate number of Hispanic (18%) and African American (26.2%) students received out-of-school suspensions for their first discipline offense.
- Students with a disability (74.6%) had a disproportionate percentage of suspensions as compared to nondisabled students (55%).

- Students who had been suspended at least once (31%) were more likely to repeat their grade than those with no disciplinary actions (5.2%).
- Almost 10% of students with one or more disciplinary contacts dropped out of school as opposed to 2% for those with no disciplinary incidents.
- A suspension or expulsion made students twice as likely to repeat a grade as compared to those who were not suspended or expelled (Fabelo et al., 2011).

These findings are concerning for school districts. With the numerous negative effects for students, including the inequitable outcomes for students with disabilities and students of color, alternatives to suspension and expulsion must be considered by school districts.

There are several risk factors associated with suspension. The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children was a birth-cohort study conducted in the United Kingdom (Paget et al., 2017). To examine the risk factors for school exclusion, Paget et al. (2017) examined data using logistic regression models in relation to being suspended by 8 years old and being suspended by 16 years old. The investigation examined 8,245 children with suspensions by 8 years old and 4,482 children with suspensions by 16 years. Paget et al. found that three family factors are linked to suspension by 8 years: rented housing, the mother receiving a suspension when in school, and maternal depression during pregnancy. Factors associated with suspension by 16 years were young maternal age, historical maternal suspension, and maternal smoking during pregnancy. In addition, psychiatric disorders and social communication difficulties were closely linked to suspension by 8 and 16 years. School factors most closely linked to suspension by 8 years old were poor relationships with teachers, social-emotional needs, and high incidence of school mobility. School factors associated with suspension by 16 years were low reading

and writing ability and an absence of parental support for learning. Paget et al. concluded that exclusions were associated with socioeconomic deprivation and exclusion were “experienced by children who already face multiple vulnerabilities in different areas and stages of life compared to their peers” (Paget et al., 2017, p. 8). Suspensions and expulsions adversely affect students who already experience more susceptibilities than their peers.

Conceptual Framework

Given the proven negative effects of school suspension and the disproportionate equity data related to school suspension, it is imperative for schools to consider alternatives to suspension. Numerous schools across the United States and abroad have begun to utilize restorative practices as an alternative to suspension and expulsion (McCluskey et al., 2008; Schumacher, 2014; Short et al., 2018; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Restorative practices provide an alternative to suspension and are used in an attempt to increase social capital and decrease the number of suspensions.

Restorative practices, according to The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), are defined as follows: “a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 1). IIRP’s (n.d.) definition of restorative practices includes the use of processes, both formal and informal, that precede wrongdoing. IIRP indicates utilizing restorative practices assists with decreasing bullying, violence, and crime; improving student behavior; providing effectual leadership; restoring relationships; and repairing harm when offenses occur.

The Advancement Project is a civil rights organization. The mission of the

organization is listed as,

Rooted in the great human rights struggles for equality and justice, we exist to fulfill America's promise of a caring, inclusive and just democracy. We use innovative tools and strategies to strengthen social movements and achieve high impact policy change. (Advancement Project, 2021, Mission section)

The Advancement Project (2014) defined restorative practices in this manner:

“Restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing” (p. 2). Restorative practices allow individuals to take responsibility for their behavior and any harm done as a result of their behavior. Taking responsibility for one's behavior means the offender must recognize an offense took place, acknowledge the offense created harm to another, take steps to repair the harm, and make a plan to ensure the offense is not repeated.

Restorative practices include both proactive actions, steps taken to prevent wrongdoing, and reactive actions, steps taken after an offense has occurred (Advancement Project, 2014).

Wachtel (2016) described the intent of restorative practices: “Human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them” (p. 3). Restorative practices encourage students to be accountable for their own actions and encourage educators to work collaboratively with students, allowing them the authority to choose.

Aspects of Restorative Practices

In this section, some restorative practices will be discussed. Restorative practices are used to prevent negative behaviors and to respond after incidents have occurred.

Proactive restorative practices, intended to prevent wrongdoing from occurring, include teaching social-emotional skills, circles, written agreements, etc. Reactive restorative practices include circles, community service, mediation, etc.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of any implementation of restorative practices. SEL teaches students to self-regulate their own emotions. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a national organization that conducts research on SEL. CASEL members include multiple members from several different school districts, colleges, and universities. CASEL (n.d.) defined SEL as follows: “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (p. 1). SEL focuses on five competency areas: building relationship skills, becoming self-aware, making responsible decisions, being socially aware, and managing one’s self (CASEL, n.d.). SEL skills enable students to calm themselves, resolve conflicts, make friends, and make proper and safe decisions.

Atwell and Bridgeland (2019), in a national survey of 710 K-12 principals, investigated the importance of SEL and compared implementation in 2019 as compared to a previous study conducted in 2017. The results of the new study demonstrated that 99% of principals surveyed acknowledged SEL skills were teachable and highly

important, and 93% believed their school should emphasize developing student SEL skills. The survey further showed that principal level of commitment had increased from 69% to 74%. Seventy-two percent of principals at low-performing schools believed a greater focus on SEL would have a major benefit on student ability to stay on track to graduate. Over half believed SEL would be advantageous for reducing absenteeism. Further, principals believed SEL will have long-lasting effects after graduation: 79% believed SEL helps students become good citizens as adults; 68% believed SEL helps prepare students for the workforce, and 57% believed SEL prepares students to get to and through college (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019). The survey showed that more work is needed to ensure SEL initiatives are implemented across districts and schools. Principals indicated the following benefits from SEL initiatives: improving relationships between teachers and students, improving relationships among students, a decline in bullying, an increase in safety, an increase in student engagement in school, and a positive influence on academic achievement (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019).

Restorative Circles

A restorative circle is a commonly used restorative practice and is referred to by several different names: restorative circles, sharing circles, circle up, social circles, and peace circles. IIRP (n.d.) indicated that restorative circles give students and adults a safe atmosphere to speak and listen in an equitable environment. IIRP further defined the purpose of a circle as “conflict resolution, healing, support, decision making, information exchange and relationship development” (IIRP, n.d., para. 2). Circles are defined by High (2017) as a practice in which “student behavior, character, and social and emotional competence is improved” (p. 528) as a result of the student feeling “connected to an

inclusive, supportive and respectful community” (p. 528). Restorative circles are used both proactively and reactively. Proactively, before an offense has occurred, circles are used to establish relationships, build a sense of community, improve student social and emotional competence, and allow students to feel heard, valued, and connected. Used reactively, circles address a conflict or offense, provide a safe space for students to speak about an offense, and offer their own perspectives (Advancement Project, 2014; High, 2017). The goal of proactive restorative circles is to improve student social and emotional competence in response to conflict or wrongdoing. Circles provide a means for students to discover their voice and learn to self-advocate (High, 2017).

Rainbolt et al. (2019) conducted a study of the implementation and efficacy of restorative practices in a high school of 1,400 students with 43 faculty respondents. The purpose of the study was to examine teacher perceptions of and experience with the implementation of restorative discipline practices. Participants responded to an online survey that consisted mostly of Likert scale-oriented questions, a few multiple choice questions, and some open-ended questions. Faculty rated restorative circles as one of the top three most effective elements of restorative practices (Rainbolt et al., 2019).

Letter Writing/Written Agreements

Weaver and Swank (2020) conducted a study in a middle school in the southeastern United States with approximately 1,000 students. A qualitative case study design was used to explore the use of restorative practices in the school, and Weaver and Swank identified five themes when examining data. The study was based on data collected during the implementation of restorative practices as a disciplinary practice. Important recurrent themes were discovered including new approaches, activities,

relationships, meaningful conversations, and expectations. Specific restorative practice activities emerged as important to a successful implementation. These were respect agreements and letter writing. Respect agreements, agreements written collaboratively between students and teachers, were written at the beginning of the school year to define respect and provide an illustration of how classmates can exhibit respect to each other. Letter writing provided students with the means to admit wrongdoing and right the wrong, tenets important to the restorative practice process (Advancement Project, 2014). Other themes from this survey are discussed later in this chapter.

Benefits of Restorative Practices

Decreased Suspension Rates

Stinchcomb et al. (2006) conducted a case study of three schools in the St. Paul district of Minnesota examining data from two elementary schools and one junior high school. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected measuring the impact on suspensions, expulsions, attendance, and school climate throughout a 3-year pilot project. During the 3-year pilot, the three schools conducted restorative circles with the goal of repairing harm when an offense occurred, developing understanding in classrooms, and promoting alternatives to violence. Qualitative information was collected from interviews, observations, and focus group data. Quantitative data included the total numbers of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and office referrals. In the first elementary school, physical acts of aggression were reduced from seven per day to less than two, 773 in Year 1 to 153 in Year 3 of the pilot. In-school suspensions decreased from 126 in Year 2 (the first-year data were available) to 42 in the third year. Out-of-school suspensions decreased from 30 in Year 1 to 11 in Year 3. There

were no expulsions at this school. Office referrals decreased considerably from 1,143 in Year 1 to 407 in Year 3. It is important to note these decreases occurred with the same student population and no difference in the mandatory reporting policy during the 3-year period. In the second elementary school, in-school suspensions increased from eight to 36, out-of-school suspensions decreased from 27 to four, and expulsions decreased from one to zero over the 3-year period. The increase in in-school suspensions and decrease in out-of-school suspensions were associated with a policy change which allowed students to remain at school, using circles and an alternative to out-of-school suspensions; however, the policy required in-school suspension for certain offenses including menacing language, temper tantrums, weapons, and fighting. Finally, at the junior high school, only out-of-school suspension and expulsion data were available. In-school suspension was not an option at this school, and office referral data were not tallied during this 3-year period. There were no expulsions. Out-of-school suspension numbers decreased drastically from 110 in Year 1 to 55 in Year 2, a 50% decrease (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

There were several other schools in the Minneapolis Public School System that had similar positive outcomes during the 3-year restorative circles pilot. At one high school, while implementing restorative circles, office referrals declined from 1,940 in Year 1 to 1,478 in Year 2. Another elementary school decreased out-of-school suspensions by 63%, while a K-8 school reduced the out-of-school suspension rate by 45% over the 3-year period. It should be noted that these schools had no substantial change in the baseline population (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Mansfield et al. (2018) conducted a study of one high school in central Virginia

and examined discipline data from 2010 to 2015 and interviewed school administrators. During this time, the school implemented restorative practices, increasing implementation each year. In 4 years, the number of office referrals decreased from over 3,000 to approximately 500. In addition, the overall suspension rates decreased. The number of in-school suspensions was 19% during the 2010-2011 school year and dropped to 7% in the 2014-2015 school year. The number of out-of-school suspensions was 12% in the 2010-2011 school year and dropped to 7% in the 2014-2015 school year. The suspension rate for Black students also decreased from 26% suspended in 2011-2012 to 12% in 2014-2015. The suspension rate for students with disabilities also dropped more than 10%. Percentages represent the number of students who received at least 1 day of in-school or out-of-school suspension. Female out-of-school suspension rates dropped from 9% in 2010-2011 to 4% in 2014-2015. When examining recidivism rates for in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension, the number of students who received in-school suspension was cut by two-thirds, and the number of students who received out-of-school suspension was cut by almost half (Mansfield et al., 2018).

Augustine et al. (2018) conducted a 2-year study with Pittsburgh Public Schools collecting qualitative data with regard to restorative practice implementation. The final 2-year study involved 44 schools including 22 treatment schools (those implementing restorative practices) and 22 control schools (those not implementing restorative practices). Data were collected through restorative practice training observations; restorative practices implementation observations in four schools; a survey of school staff; and interviews with restorative practice, school, and district staff. District and county administrative data were also collected. An impact analysis was conducted

including outcomes for students: suspensions, arrests, attendance, mobility, and achievement. The analysis also included impacts at the teacher level including student ratings of teachers, teaching performance, and value added data. In addition, teacher ratings of school-level impact were included. Teachers rated the teaching and learning conditions at the school. Suspension rates decreased in the schools implementing restorative practices. Over the 2-year study, when examining days lost to suspension, suspensions declined by 36% in restorative practice schools as opposed to 18% for non-restorative practice schools. With percentage of students suspended, in non-restorative practice schools, 16% of students in the first year and 15% of students in the second year were suspended as opposed to 13% in the schools practicing restorative practices (Augustine et al, 2018). Overall, study results indicated that utilizing restorative practices decreased the number of suspensions and the percentage of students suspended.

In a study in a middle school in California, Katic (2017) conducted a quantitative analysis of suspension data over a 5-year period from the 2011-2012 school year until the end of the 2015-2016 school year. The school implemented restorative practices beginning with the 2014-2015 school year. Suspension data from before implementation were compared to data after implementation. The suspension rate decreased by 40%. The number of suspension incidents decreased by 47.4% after restorative practice implementation, decreasing from 211 incidents to 111 incidents. In addition, the overall suspension rate decreased from 18.8% in 2011-2012 to 12.4% of the total population in 2015-2016. The suspension rate fell as low as 11.1% during the 2014-2015 school year (Katic, 2017).

Armour (2014) conducted a 3-year study in a Texas middle school with over 900

students. School records, school climate data, and surveys from caregivers, students, and teachers were collected during the school's implementation of restorative practices. Restorative practices were used with sixth-grade students during the first year and another grade level was added each year of the 3-year study. During the first year of implementation, there was an 84% decrease in out-of-school suspensions. During Year 2 of implementation, out-of-school suspensions decreased by 57% for sixth graders and 35% for seventh graders (Armour, 2014).

In a multi-year study in the Denver, Colorado Public Schools, Gonzalez (2012) studied the restorative practice implementation from 2003 to 2010. During the multi-year study, there was an overall 47% drop in out-of-school suspension rates. There was a 41% drop for Black students and a 54% drop for Latino students (Gonzalez, 2012). Gregory et al. (2018) examined Denver Public Schools data for the 2014-2015 school year. Records for 9,039 students were included in the study. The results of the study show a 51% reduction in suspension rates as a result of utilizing restorative practices.

In a study of restorative practices in three alternative schools, data were collected from student and staff surveys, aggregated suspension data, and a sample of some of the disciplinary forms used at the schools (Carroll, 2017). When examining the aggregated suspension data, Carroll (2017) found a 50% decrease in full-day suspensions as a result of restorative practice implementation.

Improving Disparities

In Augustine et al. (2018), the disparity between suspension rates of African American students and White students and the disparity between lower and higher income students shrank after the implementation of restorative practices.

In the Katic (2017) study, the African American student suspension rate dropped 6% after the implementation of restorative practices. In addition, before utilizing restorative practices, African American student suspensions accounted for 24% of overall suspensions. After the implementation of restorative practices, African American student suspensions accounted for 21% of overall suspensions, a decrease of 3%. Further, the suspension rate for Hispanic students decreased from 16% to 10% of overall suspensions.

Improved School Climate

Augustine et al. (2018) stated that in addition, as rated by teachers, the overall school climate improved because of restorative practices. As opposed to the control schools, the district's Teaching and Learning Conditions survey indicated considerably higher ratings for behavior management, school and teacher leadership, and overall teaching and learning conditions in the schools implementing restorative practices. Staff also reported stronger relationships with students as a result of restorative practices (Augustine et al., 2018). Further, the study revealed multiple impacts on practice, creating a positive atmosphere and building relationships.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Gregory et al. (2016) examined 412 student surveys completed by students in 29 classes at a high school on the east coast of the United States. Students were surveyed regarding their experience in classrooms with teachers who utilized restorative practices. Hierarchical linear modeling and regression analyses were used to show that teachers with high implementation of restorative practices had more positive relationships with their diverse students. Also, students viewed these teachers as more respectful as compared to teachers with a low restorative practice implementation rate. Furthermore,

teachers with a high restorative practice implementation rate had fewer discipline referrals than teachers with a low restorative practice implementation rate. In terms of decreasing the racial discipline gap, the findings from this study show promise. Teachers with a higher restorative practice implementation rate had a lower use of discipline referrals for defiance and disruption for African American and Latino students (Gregory et al., 2016).

Relational Themes

Ortega et al. (2016) interviewed students, staff, and administrators about their perceptions of restorative circles; 25 school staff members and administrators and 35 high school students from a municipality in the Southeast United States took part in a grounded theory methodology study. Participants were interviewed with 14 open-ended questions from three main sections: questions about general conflict, questions about school conflict, and questions about the restorative circles program. The purpose of the study was to examine how students and staff experience restorative circles and examine outcomes reported by them. Ortega et al. found subjects who participate in restorative circles experience both positive and negative outcomes.

Negative outcomes found in the Ortega et al. (2016) study included frustration and disappointment. Students expressed frustration with their peers who were not truthful during the circle process. Lying was described as a source of distrust and discomfort for both students and staff. Staff expressed frustration caused by the lack of time to build relationships with students in the circle they were facilitating. Disappointment surfaced as another negative outcome. Students indicated their disappointment when their peers refused to participate or concentrate in the restorative circle process. Students also

expressed disappointment when all students important to the conflict were not present. Disappointment with the process led to disengagement for some students. Students who were frustrated or disappointed in the circle process did not fully engage. Ortega et al indicated, “having two disengaged students is also likely to contribute to negative outcomes because they are not interacting with the process fully” (p. 464) To reduce negative outcomes, Ortega et al. made several recommendations. Student participation in restorative circles should be voluntary. Students who see the circle process as required are less likely to participate and more likely to view the process as punishment (Ortega et al., 2016).

Positive outcomes emerged for both students and adults. Students and adults reported the following positive outcomes of restorative circles: improving relationships, preventing negative conflict engagement, disturbing the school-to-prison pipeline, and conducting meaningful dialogue. Taking ownership of the process/ bypassing adults was another positive outcome indicated by students. Seeing academic and social achievements was an additional positive outcome indicated by the adults in the study (Ortega et al., 2016).

Schumacher (2014), conducting a 2-year study of 12 weekly social circles with 60 adolescent girls in an urban high school, examined data from 257 hours of participant observation. In addition, interviews were conducted with five teachers, 31 students, and two gatekeepers; and documents such as text messages and student emails were examined. As a result of participating in restorative circles, Schumacher identified four relational themes including the joy of togetherness, feeling safe, expressing genuine emotion, and cultivating empathy. In addition, multiple emotional literacy skills surfaced

from the interviews and observations: learning to listen, managing anger, and developing interpersonal sensitivity (Schumacher, 2014).

Weaver and Swank (2020) identified five themes: new approach, activities, relationships, meaningful conversations, and expectations. Weaver and Swank found, due to frustration with traditional discipline outcomes, teachers and administrators were interested in implementing restorative practices as an alternative to traditional discipline. Traditional methods of discipline had proven ineffective, and staff members were in search of a more effective discipline method. Specific restorative practice activities emerged as important to a successful restorative practice implementation. These were respect agreements and letter writing. These activities were discussed earlier in this chapter. Relationships surfaced as another recurrent theme. Relationships included a collective mentality focused on the common good of all and included peer accountability. Students and teachers were focused on a team approach and how their actions affected the group or school as a whole. Meaningful consequences described the type of consequence issued. The consequence focused on the action, as opposed to traditional discipline consequences which were at times arbitrary and unrelated to the offense. Restorative practices move consequences from exclusionary, removing a student from the situation, to specific and related to the wrongdoing, involving the student in the consequence and creating individualized consequences related to the specific offense. Last, the Weaver and Swank study highlighted the importance of expectations. Teachers pointed to the importance of establishing classroom and school expectations from the beginning of the school year. The teacher must set the tone, set the expectation for the classroom, and establish restorative practices as the norm (Weaver & Swank, 2020).

Restorative Practice Implementation Issues

When examining restorative practice implementation, Rainbolt et al. (2019) conducted a study of the implementation and efficacy of restorative practices in a high school of 1,400 students with 43 faculty respondents. The purpose of the study was to examine teacher perceptions of and experience with implementation of restorative discipline practices (Rainbolt et al., 2019). Participants responded to an online survey that consisted mostly of Likert scale-oriented questions, a few multiple choice questions, and some open-ended questions. Results concerning implementation found several recurring themes: overcoming discomfort and authentically connecting with students, the importance of onboarding, tailoring training opportunities, and time and perseverance (Rainbolt et al., 2019). The first recurring theme in this study was onboarding, ensuring that all staff were committed to the project. Beyond announcing a new restorative practice initiative and providing training, staff members felt it was essential that all staff were aware of the research related to restorative practices and why restorative practices were needed. Next, the study revealed the importance of time and perseverance. For effective implementation, staff must take the time to study and practice restorative practices and persist over time. The theme of overcoming discomfort and connecting with students authentically revealed there were certain elements of restorative practices that made teachers uncomfortable and seemed contrived. Staff recognized a core value of restorative practices, the importance of building relationships. Survey results further revealed teachers should have restorative practices training tailored to their individual needs. Individualized training would lead to enhanced implementation fidelity (Rainbolt et al., 2019).

Anyon et al. (2016) conducted a study in a large urban district with 90,546 students and 180 schools. Anyon et al. examined discipline and sociodemographic data to determine the effect of participation in a restorative intervention. Multilevel modeling of 9,921 student discipline records revealed that students from groups that are typically overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions had comparable, if not greater, rates of involvement in restorative interventions than their peers. Data showed a significant association between participation in a restorative intervention and positive discipline outcomes. In schools with higher school-wide restorative practice participation rates, students who participated in a restorative practice had less chance of receiving a second semester office referral. However, despite participation in a restorative practice, disparities in suspension data persisted for Black, low-income, and special needs students (Anyon et al., 2016). The low number of restorative interventions assigned may explain the disparities. Only 12.52% of those referred first semester received a restorative intervention. Implementation would need to be much more widespread to reduce or eliminate disparities.

Short et al. (2018) found the following challenges with restorative practice implementation: achieving consistency throughout the school, lack of staff knowledge due to staff turnover, student maturity and understanding, and active involvement from all stakeholders.

Suggestions for Successful Restorative Practice Implementation

In Augustine et al. (2018), restorative practices are promising, particularly for elementary schools. The study revealed the importance of teacher training, building capacity among staff. Staff who attended trainings, were coached by restorative practices

staff, and/or received support from the leader of their school were more apt to use restorative practices, as were staff who reported they understood the important elements of restorative practices. The following recommendations were made for school districts:

- utilize restorative practices that can be easily implemented and woven into the school day such as circles to build community, and affective statements,
- ensure school leaders can model, understand, and recognize restorative practices,
- provide professional development that is mandatory,
- provide restorative practices resources such as books and other materials,
- provide coaching by an experienced coach,
- establish restorative practices professional learning communities,
- ensure district level leaders can organize and direct the work,
- set clear expectation for implementation and update the expectations as needed, and
- set up and utilize data collection systems to gather accurate data on minor and major behavior incidents and responses to those incidents.

In a secondary school in North East England, a qualitative study was conducted (Short et al., 2018). The school had approximately 2,000 students ages 11-18 and had introduced restorative practices as a whole school approach 5 years before the study. Five school leaders were interviewed exploring the following areas: the role of restorative practices for behavior management, staff perceptions of restorative practices, and the impact of restorative practices. Several themes arose including the importance of establishing the essential elements of restorative practices, opportunity for learning,

restorative communication, and the impact on practice. The essential elements of restorative practices include creating a fair process through explanation, engagement, and clarifying expectations. Interviewees stressed the importance of creating a supportive and nurturing environment for students that allowed students to view discipline as something done with them, not to them. Restorative communication was found important. Surveys indicated that language should be non-blaming and not confrontational, promoting a sense of equality and safety. Short et al. (2018) found that all communication, verbal and nonverbal, should be nonjudgmental and promote open dialogue. Using student mistakes as a learning opportunity was also emphasized (Short et al., 2018).

Need for Further Research

Based on an extensive research review of restorative justice, after examining restorative practices in U.S. schools, Fronius et al. (2019) described restorative practices as “a promising approach to address climate, culture, and safety issues” (p. 36) in schools; however, they indicated that evidence is limited, and much of the research lacks the validity to attribute the positive outcomes exclusively to restorative practices.

Research Questions

1. What are teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural district?
2. What is the impact of the use of restorative practices in a small, rural district?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study focused on restorative practices and the influences they had on a small, rural district. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions about the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural school district. In addition, the study examined the effect of the district implementation of restorative practices. This study examined discipline and attendance data from one small, rural district in North Carolina. The district was chosen because of its district-wide implementation of restorative practices across years. Data prior to restorative practice implementation was compared to data after restorative practice implementation. Within this chapter, the research design is described. Included are the survey instruments and how data were collected and analyzed.

Research Questions

The study examined the impact of restorative practices on the outcomes in a small, rural school district. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural district?
2. What is the impact of the use of restorative practices in a small, rural district?

Context

A purposive sample of teachers in a small, rural North Carolina school district comprised the population of this study. The district of focus for the study is a small, rural district with six elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, one early college, and one learning academy. The district serves approximately 3,600 students and

has 549 employees (287 certified). Seventy-five percent of students in the district are economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The district is categorized as a low-wealth county by the state. Student demographics for the district are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics for the District of Focus

Ethnicity	Percent
White	40
Hispanic	32
Black	20
Multiracial	4
Asian	2

North Carolina uses an accountability model that assigns a grade of A-F to schools based on student achievement and student growth. School grades are calculated using a formula that combines achievement as 80% and student growth as 20%. School performance grades are calculated on a 15-point scale (A=85-100, B=70-84, C=55-69, D=40-54, F=less than 40). On the North Carolina graded accountability model, based on 2018-2019 data, one school in the district received an A, one school received a B, eight schools received Cs, and two schools received Ds. In North Carolina, schools receive an overall growth score: met, exceeded, or did not meet expected growth. Growth scores account for 20% of a school's overall grade and are calculated using EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System), a software system designed to measure the impact schools and teachers have on student achievement (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2018). With regard to growth data for the 2018-2019 school year, four schools exceeded expected growth, three schools met expected growth, and four schools did not

meet expected growth.

The district of focus was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, the district has the following core values: student centered, high expectations, data driven, continuous improvement, high ethical standards, and inclusive practices. The core values are reflected in the district strategic plan. In the 3-year strategic plan for 2017-2020, two of the district goals directly relate to this study, increasing the graduation rate and decreasing the number of out-of-school suspensions. These goals were as follows:

- Cohort Graduation Rate
 - By 2018, the 4-year cohort graduation rate will increase to meet or exceed 91%.
 - By 2020, the 4-year cohort graduation rate will increase to meet or exceed 92%.
- Out-of-School Suspension
 - By 2018, the out-of-school suspension incident rate will be reduced by 5%.
 - By 2020, the out-of-school suspension incident rate will be reduced by 10%.

The 5-year strategic plan for 2020-2025 also contains goals regarding graduation rate and decreased out-of-school suspensions.

- Cohort Graduation and Postsecondary Education
 - By 2022, the 4-year cohort graduation rate will increase to meet or exceed 92.5%, and 50% of all graduates will have received a minimum of two postsecondary credits.

- By 2025, the 4-year cohort graduation rate will increase to meet or exceed 93%, and >95% of all graduates will have received a minimum of two postsecondary credits.
- Out-of-School Suspension
 - By 2022, the out-of-school suspension incident rate will be reduced by 5%.
 - By 2025, the out-of-school suspension incident rate will be reduced by 10%.

At the end of the 2018-2019 school year, there were 560 out-of-school suspensions, representing 2096.88 total days. Considering the 2019-2020 school year, schools closed on March 13, 2020 for in-person learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data for the 2019-2020 school year are partial year data due to school closings. At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the district graduation rate was 92.3%, meeting the 2020 district strategic goal. At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, there were 367 out-of-school suspension incidents, representing a total of 1401.43 days. For this study, data from 2019-2020 were excluded. During the school closure, there were no suspensions. Without a complete year of data, it was impossible to determine if the district met the benchmark for 2020.

Second, the district was chosen because of the district-wide implementation of restorative practices beginning with the 2017-2018 school year. As part of the implementation of restorative practices, ongoing training took place beginning in 2017. The district had an informal process and utilized information from IIRP for training. The district established a diversity task force in 2017 and began training and implementing

restorative practices to assist with meeting the strategic goals of decreasing the out-of-school suspension rate and increasing the graduation rate. Training was provided using a train-the-trainer model with administrators, instructional facilitators, guidance counselors, and mental health counselors receiving training and conducting training at their individual schools. A list of training topics and personnel trained is below. Based on a needs assessment conducted by the task force, training was provided to support the implementation of restorative practices. The following training has been provided and training is ongoing:

- Equitable Practices and Restorative Practices—The district associate superintendent of accountability, diversity, and equity conducted training with school administrators
- Cultural Awareness, Understanding Equity and Applying Equitable Practices—School administrators, school counselors, instructional facilitators, and school improvement team representatives (teacher leaders) from each school were trained by Dr. James Ford, Executive Director of the Center for Racial Equity in Education.
- Social Circles, Facilitative Dialogue, and Mediation—School administrators, school counselors, instructional facilitators, and mental health counselors were trained by Dr. Jon Powell and Ms. Joia Caron from the Campbell Law School Restorative Justice Center.
- SEL—School administrators and school counselors were trained by Dr. Johnson, UNC-Pembroke. School counselors provided training to all school personnel and completed SEL lessons with students. Instructional facilitators

also include an SEL training activity each week in professional learning community meetings.

- Communication and Relationship Building—Dr. Adam Jordan provided training to high-priority schools in the district.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)—The district superintendent completed ACES training with all staff at beginning-of-the-year faculty meetings. Instructional facilitators continued the training by providing a weekly ACES instructional strategy in weekly professional learning community meetings.
- Trauma Resistant Training and Trauma-Informed Practices—All staff were trained by Deahdra Chambers, mental health professional. Staff were trained at monthly faculty meetings at individual schools.

In addition to professional development, each school was required to establish a school-level diversity and equity plan, outlining the restorative practices that would be implemented in the building. School improvement teams at each individual school develop their school plans. The plans include the types of restorative practices that will be implemented in the school and specific action steps that will be taken. In addition, equity plans must include a list of observable practices from the Equitable Classroom Practices Checklist that will be the focus for the school year. Schools choose from the following list of practices:

- Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom
- Uses eye contact with all students
- Uses proximity with all students equitably

- Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all student questions and opinions are important
- Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion
- Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students
- Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning
- Learns, uses, and displays some words in the students' heritage language
- Models use of graphic organizers
- Uses class building and team building activities to promote peer support for academic achievement
- Uses random response strategies
- Uses cooperative learning structures
- Structures heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning
- Uses probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer
- Acknowledges all comments, responses, questions, and contributions of students
- Seeks multiple perspectives
- Uses multiple approaches to consistently monitor student understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content
- Identifies the current knowledge of students before instruction
- Uses real-life experiences of students to connect school learning to their lives
- Uses Wait Time

- Asks students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction
- Provides students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion
- Gives students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance
- Provides multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard
- Explains and models positive self-talk
- Asks higher-order questions equitably of all students
- Provides individual help to all students (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2010).

Individual school plans are reviewed and approved by the assistant superintendent of diversity and equity. Quarterly, diversity and equity walkthroughs are conducted at each school by district office personnel. In addition, the district classroom walkthrough tool includes a section on culturally responsive instructional strategies. Quarterly, administrators meet with executive leadership to review plan implementation and examine classroom walkthrough data. The plans are updated each year. Further, administrators and instructional facilitators have participated in two book studies related to restorative practices, *Building Equity* and *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence*.

Sampling Technique

Samples allow researchers to gather data through observation or study in order to make observations and conclusions about a population (Abbott & McKinney, 2012; Taherdoost, 2016). This study applied a purposive sample accessing all teachers within

the district. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study as it sought to glean the perception of teachers regarding the district-implemented restorative practices initiative. The research purpose aligns with the perspectives of teachers, thus individuals employed as teachers were deliberately selected. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to include participants within a study based upon deliberate characteristics (Taherdoost, 2016). The sampling method provides benefit in that it is convenient, low-cost, and not bound by time constraints; and the researcher will have access to the sample (Taherdoost, 2016). A limitation exists to the purposive sampling method for this study, as the results do not afford the ability to generalize the conclusions beyond the study setting.

A statistical power analysis was performed to determine the estimated sample size. The district employs approximately 289 teachers. With an $\alpha=0.05$ and power=0.80, the projected sample size needed with this effect size is approximately 165 ($N=165$).

Instrumentation

This study utilized a survey tool developed by the RAND Corporation to evaluate the impact of restorative practices. The instrument addressed both the efficacy and frequency of restorative practices in a given setting. As the instrument developed by the RAND Corporation had not been previously used, Augustine et al. (2018) completed an exploratory factor analysis that identified four survey measures: buy-in ($\alpha=0.91$); confidence ($\alpha=0.85$); perceived impact on culture ($\alpha=0.94$); and perceived impact on handling conflict ($\alpha=0.85$). The tool utilized a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 4, strongly agree. The frequency of restorative practices utilizes a 5-point Likert scale where 0=never, 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=often, and 4=always.

Frequency ratings pertain to behaviors related to restorative practices such as affective statements, proactive circles, impromptu conferences, and responsive circles (Augustine et al., 2018). As in the original study, the survey was administered electronically.

Data Collection Procedures

1. This study utilized a mixed methods research design.
2. I obtained permission from Gardner-Webb University IRB.
3. I obtained consent to conduct research with the school district by completing the district data request form.
4. I followed district protocol to disseminate the survey to participants and collect district discipline and attendance data. The survey was reviewed and approved by the district superintendent. All discipline and attendance data needed were included on the district's data request form. The form was reviewed and approved by the district superintendent.
5. Participants received a link to complete the survey/questionnaire via email. An email was sent by the district's public information officer.
6. Participants anonymously completed the survey.
7. Data collected from surveys were maintained on an encrypted server accessible only to me.

Participants

Participants included teachers in the district. Elementary, middle, and high school teachers were invited to participate. After obtaining permission to conduct the survey, the survey link was disseminated to all teachers via email. An email with the survey explanation and link was sent by the school district's public information officer. The

email included an introductory portion that addressed consent to participate and confidentiality. Participants were informed that their individual responses would not be shared with anyone working in the district and no identifiable information would be collected. One week after the initial email invitation, a second email invitation was sent. The second email was also sent by the public information officer and encouraged non-respondents to complete the survey.

Data Sources

Survey

The survey used is described in the Instrumentation section of this chapter. Survey data for the study were gathered from a web-based survey administered to teachers in the district. The survey was a Google survey (Appendix A). Participant anonymity was protected, as no names or email addresses were collected. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information from teachers about their perceptions and experiences with restorative practice implementation in the district. The survey used was a survey utilized in a 2-year study of restorative practices with Pittsburgh Public Schools (Augustine et al., 2018). Portions of the Year 1 survey were utilized. Permission to use the survey was granted by Catherine Augustine (Appendix B).

District Discipline and Attendance Data

Data were collected from PowerSchool, the statewide data management system. Attendance and disciplinary data were collected for 2016-2019. PowerSchool data differentiate disciplinary incidents by the type of disciplinary action assigned to students, the number of days of instruction was lost, and race/ethnicity. For each incident type, the number of students receiving a particular disciplinary consequence was reported by

gender and race/ethnicity. The following race/ethnicity categories are reported: Asian, Hispanic, Black, American Indian/Pacific Islander, White, and Multiracial. Gender is reported as male or female. Discipline data reported also included the number of repeat offenders, those students who were suspended more than once. Attendance data were collected and examined utilizing the same race/ethnicity and gender categories. Attendance data were reported as a percentage per grade level, allowing disaggregation by level: elementary, middle, and high.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1 was, “What are teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural district?” This question was answered utilizing survey data collected. Survey Questions 4-7 addressed teacher confidence with restorative practices. Survey Question 8 addressed the level of leadership support. Survey Question 9 addressed challenges with restorative practice implementation. Survey Questions 10-19 addressed specific restorative practices: affective statements, proactive circles, and impromptu conferences. Teacher perceived impact was examined for each of these restorative practices. Question 20 addressed teacher perceptions of the impact on staff community. Question 21 addressed teacher perceptions of how students feel about restorative practices.

Data for Research Question 1 were collected by examining survey responses. The survey used a Likert scale, and participants responded to the frequency of the given statement/prompt. Likert scale survey data were used to measure teacher perceptions. Means and standard deviations were calculated as well as frequencies examined to determine which practices were successful and which ones were challenging. The survey

also contained one open-ended question, asking respondents to offer any additional information they had concerning restorative practices. After a thorough review of all responses, key themes were identified and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Research Question 2 was, “What is the impact of the use of restorative practices in a small, rural district?” This question was answered by examining district data. Attendance data were collected from PowerSchool, the statewide data management system. In examining the impacts, attendance and disciplinary data were collected for school years 2016- 2019. Data for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, after restorative practice implementation, were compared to data from 2015-2016, before restorative practice implementation. PowerSchool data differentiate disciplinary incidents by the type of disciplinary action assigned to students, the number of days of instruction was lost, and race/ethnicity. For each incident, the number of students receiving a particular disciplinary action was reported by race/ethnicity and gender. The number of repeat offenders was also reported. Repeat offenders were defined as those students who received more than one incidence of out-of-school suspension during a school year.

To answer Research Question 2, descriptive statistics were calculated for overall incidences of student disciplinary outcomes and attendance. I examined school system data for 3 school years: 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019. The 2016-2017 school year served as the baseline year. Data at the end of the 2018-2019 school year, after 2 years of restorative practice implementation, were examined and compared to the baseline data. The frequencies were judged to ascertain whether fluctuation can be attributed to restorative practices. I examined suspension and attendance data prior to implementation and after the implementation of restorative practices. The number of

suspensions, number of instructional days lost, and attendance percentages, disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, were compared. In addition, the number of repeat offenders was examined and compared. Repeat offenders were defined as those students who had more than one out-of-school suspension incident in a given school year. A paired sample *t* test was used to determine whether the differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) between the baseline year, 2016-2017 attendance, discipline rates, and number of repeat offenders, and that of implementation years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.

While instructional days lost were examined, the resulting impact on learning was not included in this study. With the learning loss due to the mandatory school shutdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a thorough analysis of academic data was not included.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the superintendent of the district of focus (Appendix C). The survey was anonymous to protect participants and allow them to give honest opinions regarding restorative practices in the district.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand what teachers perceive to be successful and challenging with restorative practice implementation and the influence restorative practices have within a small, rural school district.

Data from the survey teachers completed were used to answer Research Question 1, “What are teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural district?” Survey data collected were used to rate teacher understanding of restorative practices, perceived impact of restorative practice use, level of leadership

support, and challenges faced with restorative practice implementation. Additionally, the survey provided data about the use of three specific restorative practices: affective statements, restorative circles, and conferences. By analyzing teacher Likert scale responses, I was able to analyze teacher perceptions. The district was able to glean data concerning implementation, leadership support, and training. Survey results allowed the district to gauge teacher understanding of restorative practices and make decisions about training based on the data, areas where training was sufficient, and potential areas that warrant additional training.

School district discipline, including repeat offenders, and attendance data were used to analyze Research Question 2, “What is the impact of the use of restorative practices in a small, rural district?” Analyzing data after 2 years of implementation, the impact of restorative practices was determined. Data from Research Question 2 were used to understand the impact of restorative practices on the number of suspensions. By analyzing suspension and attendance data, I was able to ascertain the extent of impact for each subgroup.

Chapter 4: Results

This mixed methods study focused on the impact of restorative practices on a small, rural district. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions surrounding the implementation of restorative practices. A survey was utilized to examine teacher perceptions. In addition, the study examined the effect of the implementation of restorative practices in the district. The impact of the implementation of restorative practices was measured using discipline and attendance data from Powerschool. Data for 3 consecutive school years were examined, including 1 year prior to restorative practice implementation and 2 years after restorative practice implementation. Data prior to restorative practice implementation were compared to data after restorative practice implementation. Within this chapter, study results are organized and discussed to determine if restorative practices had an impact on attendance, discipline, and repeat offenders.

Description of Sample

The district of focus is a small, rural district in North Carolina. The district serves approximately 3,600 students and has 549 employees (287 certified). The district has six elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, one early college high school, and one learning academy. Student discipline and attendance data for all K-12 students in the district of focus were utilized to examine attendance rates, number of instructional days lost, number of out-of-school suspensions, and number of repeat offenders. In addition to data, a survey was administered. A purposive sample of certified teachers who taught in the district during the 2017-2018 and/or 2018-2019 school year(s) participated in the survey.

Of the 237 certified teachers in the district, 59 teachers participated in the survey. Of the 59 respondents, 46% were teachers at the elementary school level, 8% were teachers at the middle school level, and 46% were teachers at the high school level.

The research questions were answered using information received from the administered survey and attendance and disciplinary data gathered from PowerSchool, the statewide data management system. Information from these data sources is presented in response to each research question.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was, “What are teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in a small, rural district,” and was answered utilizing collected survey data. The survey administered was a Likert scale survey that examined teacher confidence with restorative practices, level of leadership support, challenges associated with restorative practice implementation, teacher perceptions of the impact of specific restorative practices, teacher perceptions about the impact of restorative perceptions on the staff community, and teacher perceptions of how students feel about restorative practices. The survey also contained one open-ended question, asking respondents to offer any additional insight they had concerning restorative practices.

To determine means, Likert scale responses were assigned numerical values: Strongly agree was assigned a numerical value of 4; agree was assigned a value of 3; disagree was assigned a value of 2; and strongly disagree was assigned a value of 1.

Teacher Confidence

Teacher confidence with restorative practice implementation was assessed using Questions 4 and 7 of the survey. Question 4 asked teachers their level of agreement with

the following statements:

- I believe that restorative practices can help to improve student behavior.
- The majority of staff in this school believes that restorative practices can help improve student behavior.
- Learning restorative practices is worth my time.
- Adopting restorative practices is worthwhile for my school.
- I am confident that I know the purpose of restorative practices.
- I am confident that I know the restorative practice methods.
- I am confident in my ability to use restorative practices with the majority of students in my school.
- Student behavior in my school has improved as a result of restorative practices.
- The school culture/climate has improved as a result of restorative practices.
- The way that students handle conflict with adults has improved as a result of restorative practices.
- The way that students handle conflict with other students has improved as a result of restorative practices.
- The way that adults handle conflicts with other adults has improved as a result of restorative practices.

Question 7 asked teachers the extent of their agreement with these statements:

- I am confident in my ability to use restorative practices in my classroom.
- Student behavior in my classroom has improved as a result of restorative practices.

- In my classroom(s), culture/climate has improved as a result of restorative practices.

With regard to their ability to utilize restorative practices with their students, 20.3% strongly agreed and 64.4% agreed they are confident in their ability. When asked if they were confident in their ability to use restorative practices in their classroom, 18.6% strongly agreed and 71.2% agreed they were confident. Only six respondents, or 10.2%, indicated they disagreed or were not confident in their ability to implement restorative practices. Question 7 addressed teacher confidence regarding classroom behavior and classroom culture/climate. In response to restorative practices, 15.3% strongly agreed and 64.4% agreed that student classroom behavior had improved, while 15.3% strongly agreed and 67.8% agreed that the culture/climate in their classrooms had improved as a result of restorative practices.

The teacher confidence questions asked teachers about their perception of the worth of restorative practices, teacher confidence with restorative practice methods, teacher ability to implement restorative practices, and teacher confidence in the ability of restorative practices to improve behavior and to improve culture and climate. The mean for teacher confidence was 3.25, indicating that the majority of teachers who participated in the survey are confident with restorative practices and perceive restorative practices as a worthwhile endeavor. Teacher confidence with restorative practices was strong, indicating strong district implementation.

Teacher Understanding

Question 5 addressed teacher understanding, "Please indicate to what extent you feel you understand the elements of restorative practices." Specifically, teachers were

asked about their understanding of the elements of restorative practices. Twenty-two percent of respondents indicated they knew the elements but could not define them, 42.4% indicated they knew the elements, 30.5% indicated they knew the elements and could explain them to a peer, and 5.1% indicated they could train another person to use the elements of restorative practices. Although given the option, no respondents indicated they did not understand restorative practices. There was strong evidence of teacher understanding of restorative practices.

When asked if they understood the purpose of restorative practices, 30.5% strongly agreed and 64.4% agreed. In response to their understanding of the restorative practice methods, 16.9% strongly agreed and 69.5% agreed they knew the methods. Research Question 1 examined the implementation of restorative practices. When considering teacher understanding as it relates to the implementation of restorative practices, the data demonstrate district implementation was successful. Teachers understood the purpose of restorative practices and the methods.

Perceived Impacts

Improving Suspensions. Assessing change in student behavior and suspensions, Question 6, asked about behaviors that resulted in suspension prior to and after the implementation of restorative practices. Thirty percent of respondents indicated that the same behaviors that received a suspension before restorative practices also receive a suspension now, and 54.2% indicated that behaviors that resulted in a suspension before restorative practice implementation do not result in a suspension now. Seven percent indicated that behaviors that did not result in suspension before restorative practice implementation now result in suspension, and 8.5% indicated they did not work at the

school prior to the implementation of restorative practices. When considering Research Question 1, behavior/suspension teacher perception data provide strong evidence of a successful implementation. Over 54% of teachers indicated the same behaviors that received suspension before restorative practices did not receive a suspension after implementation, indicating implementation of restorative practices to prevent suspensions. Conversely, 30% indicated the same behaviors continue to receive suspensions. These data also provide evidence of strong implementation. When considering the district implementation of restorative practices, it is important to note that students continued to receive suspensions for some of the same offenses for which they had been suspended previously, i.e., drugs and weapons. This will be particularly significant as the data for Research Question 2 are examined. Research Question 2 looks at the impact on suspension rates. With a decrease in suspension rates, it is important to note these data. To reduce the number of suspensions, a district could issue a mandate forbidding suspension, thus one could not ascertain if the decrease was a result of the initiative in place, in this case, restorative practices. In the district studied, perception data give evidence that suspensions still happened for some offenses but did not happen for other offenses that had previously received suspensions, helping to attribute the decrease in suspensions to the implementation of restorative practices.

Improving Behavior. When asked about their perception of restorative practices improving student behavior, 32.2% of respondents indicated they strongly agreed and 62.7% of respondents indicated they agreed that restorative practices helped to improve student behavior. Also, 15.3% strongly agreed and 64.4% agreed that student behavior had improved as a result of restorative practices. When asked about the staff at their

school, 16.9% of respondents strongly agreed that the majority of school staff believe that student behavior improved as a result of restorative practices, and 69.5% agreed. When examining time investment, 33.9% strongly agreed and 59.3% agreed that restorative practices are worth the time invested.

Impact on Culture/Climate. When questioned about the impact of restorative practices on school climate and culture, 15.3% strongly agreed and 61% agreed that school culture/climate has improved as a result of restorative practices. In addition, with regard to conflict, respondents indicated the way students handle conflict with adults had improved, 6.8% strongly agreed and 67.8% agreed; and 6.8% strongly agreed and 64.4% agreed that the way students handle conflict with other students had improved due to restorative practice implementation. Further, 11.9% strongly agreed and 64.4% agreed that the way adults handle conflict with other adults has improved due to restorative practices. Teacher perceptions indicate a strong correlation between the implementation of restorative practices and an increase in the culture/climate of their school.

Level of Leadership Support. Question 8 asked about the level of leadership support from the principal and the school leadership team. Considering all teacher survey responses, 76.3% indicated they were provided with general information about restorative practices, 64.4% indicated they had specific questions answered about implementing restorative practices, 57.6% indicated the principal and school leadership team had modeled restorative practices, and 40.7% indicated they were provided feedback based on observing their use of restorative practices. Only one respondent indicated they did not receive any support from leadership. Three respondents listed other supports they received: One indicated an email was sent, one stated they received help with finding

new behavior strategies and connecting with resources, and one indicated they were provided with time to discuss with colleagues. Overall, the responses to this question indicate strong leadership support in the district. The majority of teachers surveyed indicated they received strong support during the restorative practices initiative, further evidence of a strong implementation.

Challenges With Implementing Restorative Practices. Survey Question 9 addressed challenges with restorative practice implementation. Respondents were given eight choices for challenges faced with the implementation of restorative practices. Respondents were asked to check all challenges that applied. Table 2 lists the challenges and percentage of respondents who indicated the particular challenge. Time constraints and student attitudes were the biggest challenges indicated. Participants were also given an option to type in challenges that were not listed. Three respondents listed COVID-19 school closure as an obstacle to restorative practice implementation. Two respondents indicated there were no significant challenges. With regard to Research Question 1, teachers perceived time as a significant challenge to the implementation of restorative practices. For a successful implementation, teachers must have sufficient time to apply learned practices. Another significant note regarding these data is that lack of administrative support was listed as the most insignificant problem with implementation. These data correspond with data from the level of leadership survey questions, another piece of data demonstrating the strength of leadership support for restorative practices in the district.

Table 2*Most Significant Challenges With Restorative Practice Implementation*

Challenge	Percent
Time constraints	47.4
Student attitudes	40.7
Limited training	22
Lack of understanding of expectations	16.9
Lack of buy-in/belief restorative practices can work	15.2
Unclear discipline policy	13.6
Leadership/staff turnover	3.4
Lack of administrative support	1.7

Survey Questions 10-19 addressed specific restorative practices: affective statements, proactive circles, and impromptu conferences. Teacher perceived impact was examined for each of these restorative practices. Question 20 addressed teacher perceptions of the impact on staff community. Question 21 addressed teacher perceptions of how students feel about restorative practices.

Use of Restorative Practices. Survey Questions 10-19 examined usage and understanding of specific restorative practices: affective statements, proactive circles, and impromptu conferences. When examining teacher use of each restorative practice, a 5-point Likert scale was used: 0=never, 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=often, and 4=always. Frequency ratings pertain to behaviors related to restorative practices. Examining all aspects of the three specific restorative practices, survey results indicating affective statements had an average of 2.9, proactive circles received an average of 2.49, and impromptu conferences received an average of 2.57. These ratings indicate that all restorative practices examined scored on average between sometimes and often regarding usage.

Affective Statements. Of the staff who responded to the survey, 64.4% reported

using affective statements often or always, 66% indicating affective statements were a part of “how we do things” at our school, and 54% indicated their colleagues regularly use affective statements. There is strong evidence that affective statements were regularly utilized as a part of restorative practice implementation. Considering the most significant constraint found for restorative practice implementation was time, affective statement findings are consistent with those data. Affective statements can be easily woven into the regular routine of a classroom, requiring little extra time.

Proactive Circles. When considering the use of proactive circles, 20.3% of staff reported using them often or always. Teachers reported running an average of 1.36 proactive circles per week. In addition, 20.3% of respondents indicated proactive circles were a part of “how we do things” at our school, while 18.6% of teachers indicated their colleagues used small proactive circles. Examining teacher perceptions of proactive circles, while teachers indicate their training was sufficient, the use of proactive circles is low. Again, with time surfacing as the number one challenge for implementation, these findings are logical. Proactive circles must be planned ahead of time, and class time must be used to initiate a proactive circle. As part of ongoing implementation, the district should consider a focus on increasing the use of proactive circles. Proactive circles help to improve student social and emotional competence in response to conflict or wrongdoing (High, 2017), helping to avoid future offenses.

Impromptu Conferences. When asked about impromptu conferences, 59.3% of staff reported using impromptu conferences often or always. Teachers reported using impromptu conferences on average 2.19 times per week, with 27% of teachers indicating their colleagues used impromptu conferences. Last, 35.6% of respondents indicated

impromptu conferences were a part of “how we do things” at their school. In terms of teacher perceptions regarding restorative practice implementation, impromptu conferences are utilized more often than proactive circles. It is important to note that impromptu conferences are reactive, meaning they take place after an offense has occurred. Teacher perception data indicate reactive measures are more often utilized than proactive measures.

Staff Community. Question 20 asked teachers to indicate the frequency of restorative practice use with other staff members. When asked about the use of affective statements with other staff members, 64.4% indicated they use them often or always; 28.8% indicate they use proactive circles often or always; and 55.9% indicated the school administration models restorative practices often or always. Overall, when asked if staff meet the criteria of a high-quality restorative staff community, 47.5% of teachers answered often or always. Using the Likert scale, the overall rating for staff community was 2.18, placing staff community between sometimes and often for implementation of restorative practices. These data make it clear that there is still work to be done with regard to the utilization of restorative practices with and among staff. The majority of respondents indicated modeling by school administration. Again, the lowest data point is proactive circles. The implementation of proactive circles continues to surface as an area that needs to be strengthened.

Teacher Perceptions of Student Feelings About Restorative Practices.

Question 21 of the survey asked about student feelings. Using a 4-point Likert scale for responses, with 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree and 4=strongly agree, the average was 2.91. Of all respondents, 86.5% agree or strongly agree that students enjoy

proactive circles, while 83.1% agree or strongly agree that students engage with restorative questions and understand the goal of restorative practices. Last, 89.8% of teachers agree or strongly agree that students respect restorative practices.

Open-Ended Question. Question 22 gave respondents a chance to provide any additional information regarding restorative practices in their school or classroom. Of the 59 respondents, 34 responded to the open-ended question; 18 of the 34 indicated they had no additional information. Three themes emerged from the other responses: pandemic school closure, implementation suggestions, and improved culture.

Seven responses mentioned the COVID-19 school closure and virtual learning. All seven responses indicated difficulty implementing restorative practices because of virtual learning. These responses indicate a misunderstanding of the survey. The survey asked respondents to answer based on implementation during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, before the pandemic. The email sent with the survey link and the directions at the top of the survey indicate survey responses should be based on the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. In addition, Survey Question 1 asked the respondents to indicate which of those school years they were employed by the district. Pandemic responses provided included the following:

- “Haven’t implemented the full program of restorative practices like we could due to COVID.”
- “Due to the pandemic, we have not been able to implement any of these restorative practices.”
- “Difficult because we were virtual over half the year.”
- “Due to students being remote, restorative practices were not implemented

and now we are in-person this has not been done due to CDC guidelines.”

- “This has been an extremely unusual year. We were virtual over half the year plus we merged facilities at a new high school. There have been very few behavior issues that I know of because we were out due to COVID.”
- “We haven’t implemented the full program of restorative practices like we could due to COVID.”
- “COVID-19 has impacted our ability to institute many of these practices.”

Three responses offer implementation information. One respondent stated, “consistent implementation is the key to success.” Another respondent indicated they had “only had a brief introduction to restorative practices.” Another respondent stated, “We completed a book study on restorative practices. Some took to it, others still struggle.” Another respondent stated, “family communication and support is key.”

The last theme that emerged from the open-ended question related to culture improvement. Three respondents mentioned improvements in school culture. One responded, “Over the course of the last 4 years, I have watched students grow accustomed to these strategies. They utilize them on their own and respond positively to them in most situations.” Another responded, “It is a great way to communicate and interact.” Another stated, “Restorative practices in a school are critical to improve the culture.” These data are consistent with findings from the study by Augustine et al. (2018) where teachers reported improved school climate as a result of restorative practices.

When examining teacher perception data in response to Research Question 1, it is clear the majority of teacher respondents considered the district implementation to be

beneficial. Teachers indicated an understanding of restorative practices and perceived the implementation to be worthwhile. In addition, they indicated their confidence in and belief that restorative practices improve student behavior, suspension rates, and the climate and culture of their school. Further, data showed strong leadership support for the restorative practice initiative in the district. There were several challenges to implementation indicated. Time constraints and student attitudes toward the process surfaced as the most prevalent challenges. When examining the use of specific restorative practices, some are clearly implemented with a higher level of fidelity than others. Affective statements were utilized most often, followed by impromptu conferences and proactive circles. These data are consistent with the perception data related to challenges with implementation. Given the noted challenge of time constraints, the use of restorative practice data corresponds. When considering the restorative practices studied, affective statements, the practice indicated as most often used, requires the least amount of time and preparation. Proactive circles, the practice indicated as least often used, requires the most amount of time and preparation.

Teacher perception data indicate strong understanding, training, support from leadership, and student buy-in. However, although teachers understand the practices and indicate they believe in the practices to make a positive difference with regard to student behavior and school culture/climate, perception data show that certain practices are underutilized.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was, “What is the impact of the use of restorative practices in a small, rural district?” This question was answered by examining district data.

Attendance data were collected from PowerSchool, the statewide data management system. In examining the impacts, attendance and disciplinary data were collected for school years 2016-2019. Data for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, after restorative practice implementation, were compared to data from 2015-2016, before restorative practice implementation.

Attendance Data Analysis

Table 3 lists attendance data for Grades K-12, including the mean and standard deviation, where N represents the 13 grade levels, K-12. From the baseline year, 2016-2017, the attendance rate has improved. There was an increase in attendance rate with each year of restorative practice implementation, from 91.69 to 93.45. In addition to the increased mean for attendance, the standard deviation decreased, 3.68 to 2.28, indicating less variance.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation Attendance Rates

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Baseline year	91.69	3.68	13
First year	92.95	3.10	13
Second year	93.45	2.28	13

In addition, a paired samples t test was conducted to compare the statistical difference between the baseline year and each year after restorative practice implementation. The results are in Table 4. After 2 years of restorative practice implementation, there was a significant difference between the attendance rate for the baseline year 2016-2017 ($M=91.69$; $SD=3.68$) and the attendance rate for 2018-2019 ($M=93.45$; $SD=2.28$); $p=0.13$.

Table 4*Results of Paired Sample t Test of Attendance Rates*

School year	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean difference
2016-2017 v. 2017-2018	1.627	12	0.13	0.776
2016-2017 v. 2018-2019	2.510	12	0.0274	0.700

Table 5 provides attendance data disaggregated by gender. The table lists attendance data for each gender, including the mean and standard deviation, where *N* represents the 13 grade levels, K-12. For female students, there was a mean increase of 1.54 in attendance rates across the first 2 years of restorative practice implementation. For male students, the mean increased 1.34 during this same time period. Of note, there was a larger increase in the mean for both genders after the first year of implementation, 3 for females and 2.26 for males. After the first and second years of implementation, females experienced a greater increase in attendance rates than males.

Table 5*Mean and Standard Deviation of Attendance Rates by Gender*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Female			
SY 2016-2017	91.33	3.85	13
SY 2017-2018	94.33	1.72	13
SY 2018-2019	92.87	2.45	13
Male			
SY 2016-2017	91.93	3.81	13
SY 2017-2018	94.19	1.40	13
SY 2018-2019	93.27	2.08	13

Table 6 provides attendance data disaggregated by race/ethnicity. The table lists attendance data for Grades K-12, including the mean and standard deviation, where *N*

represents the grade levels represented, K-12. If N is less than 13, the total number of grade levels, this indicates there were only certain grade levels with students of that ethnicity. After 2 years of implementation, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Two or More subgroups had increased means. American Indian/Alaskan Native and White subgroups both experienced a decrease in attendance mean. It is important to note there were only five students in the Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander subgroup and only six students in the American Indian/Alaskan Native subgroup.

Table 6*Mean and Standard Deviation of Attendance Rates by Race/Ethnicity*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
2016-2017			
American Indian/Alaskan Native	91.60	3.70	4
Asian	95.59	3.43	13
Black or African American	92.45	4.07	13
Hispanic	92.22	4.61	13
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	90.12	10.38	3
Two or More	92.07	4.84	13
White	92.51	4.20	13
2017-2018			
American Indian/Alaskan Native	86.93	6.56	3
Asian	95.86	4.30	13
Black or African American	94.64	1.84	13
Hispanic	95.28	1.93	13
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	94.55	4.04	5
Two or More	90.95	7.21	12
White	93.53	1.24	13
2018-2019			
American Indian/Alaskan Native	88.58	6.48	6
Asian	96.11	2.85	13
Black or African American	93.53	2.22	13
Hispanic	93.79	3.15	13
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	95.34	0.33	4
Two or More	92.58	4.07	13
White	92.22	2.19	13

Discipline Data Analysis

Table 7 includes the mean and standard deviation for unique offenders, the number of students who received out-of-school suspensions in the district of focus. The

mean, standard deviation, and number of unique offenders decreased each year of implementation. The mean decreased by 9.58, the standard deviation decreased by 12.78, and the number of offenders decreased by 67. This is a promising, positive trend after 2 years of implementation of restorative practices.

Table 7

Mean and Standard Deviation of Unique Offenders

School year	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
2016-2017	58.29	70.70	408
2017-2018	51.00	60.63	357
2018-2019	48.71	57.92	341

Table 8 shows the number of students who received out-of-school suspensions during the years of the study, disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity. After 2 years of restorative practice implementation, there was no significant change between percentages for gender. The percentage of female offenders increased by 1%, and male offenders decreased by 1%. When examining ethnicity, Black, Hispanic, and White subgroups all had a decrease in the number of unique offenders; however, only the Hispanic and White subgroups experienced a decrease in suspension percentage. While the Black subgroup only represented 20% of the total population, they experienced 41.6% of the out-of-school suspensions in the district. In contrast, Hispanics represented 32% of the district population and made up 20.8% of the out-of-school suspensions, and White students represented 40% of the overall population but 31.1% of the suspensions.

Table 8*Discipline Unique Offenders*

	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender						
Female	119	29	103	29	103	30
Male	289	71	254	71	238	70
Ethnicity						
Asian	2	0.5	1	0.3	3	0.9
Black	156	38.2	149	41.7	142	41.6
Hispanic	94	23	76	21.3	71	20.8
American Indian	1	0.2	1	0.3	1	0.3
Pacific Islander	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.3
Multi-Racial	12	2.9	20	5.6	17	5.0
White	143	35	109	30.5	106	31.1

Table 9 includes the results of a paired sample *t* test of unique offenders who received out-of-school suspensions in the district of focus. There was not a significant difference between the baseline year and 1 or 2 years after restorative practice implementation. To note, there is a positive trajectory leading toward significance.

Table 9*Paired Sample t Test of Discipline Offenders*

School year	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean difference
2016-2017 v. 2017-2018	1.350	6	0.226	5.397
2016-2017 v. 2018-2019	1.613	6	0.158	5.936
2017-2018 v. 2018-2019	1.922	6	0.103	1.190

Instructional Days Lost

Tables 10 and 11 provide information about days of instruction lost as a result of out-of-school suspensions. When examining the total number of instructional days lost, the mean decreased by 81.47 days and the standard deviation decreased by 110.18. When

examining the data disaggregated by gender, the percentage of days lost for female students increased by 4%, from 26% to 30%. The percentage of days lost for male students decreased by 4%, from 74% to 70%. When examining the data disaggregated by ethnicity, the percentage of the number of days lost decreased for the Black, Hispanic, and American Indian subgroups.

Table 10

Mean and Standard Deviation of Instructional Days Lost

School year	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
2016-2017	266.2	331.33	1863.4
2017-2018	215.79	268.98	1510.5
2018-2019	184.73	221.15	1293.1

Table 11

Discipline Days Lost

	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender						
Female	482.7	26	395	26	385.3	30
Male	1380.8	74	1126.5	74	907.8	70
Ethnicity						
Asian	3	0.2	10	0.7	8	0.6
Black	845.4	45.4	681.5	45.1	533.8	41.3
Hispanic	354.5	19	231	15.3	220.6	17.1
American Indian	6	0.3	10	0.7	2	0.2
Pacific Islander	0	0	6	0.4	1	0.1
Multi-Racial	103.5	5.6	88	5.8	91.5	7.1
White	551.1	29.6	484	32.0	436.2	33.7

Repeat Offenders Data Analysis

When examining discipline data related to the implementation of restorative practices, it is necessary to consider the number of repeat offenders. Examining the

recidivism rate is a necessary component of evaluating the implementation of restorative practice work. To ascertain if restorative practices inhibit future suspensions, the number of repeat offenders was examined and disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. Table 12 displays the number of unique offenders and repeat offenders for all 3 years examined. In addition, the percent of repeat offenders in relation to total offenders is displayed. The number of repeat offenders decreased from 153 to 104 during the first 2 years of implementation. In addition, during the baseline year, repeat offenders represented 37.5% of the total number of offenders. After 2 years of implementation, the number of repeat offenders decreased to 30.5% of total offenders.

Table 12

Number of Repeat Offenders

School year	Number of unique offenders	Number of repeat offenders	Repeat offenders % of total offenders
Baseline year 2016-2017	408	153	37.5%
Year 1 of implementation 2017-2018	357	103	28.9%
Year 2 of implementation 2018-2019	341	104	30.5%

Table 13 displays the repeat offender data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. After 2 years of implementation, the number of female repeat offenders decreased by 15, and the number of male repeat offenders decreased by 34. When examining ethnicity, after 2 years of restorative practice implementation, the number of repeat offenders decreased for all subgroups except the Asian subgroup, but it is important to note there was only one offender in that subgroup. This is promising data regarding restorative

practice implementation in the district. Fewer students, in multiple subgroups, received repeat suspensions after 2 years of restorative practice implementation. The number of repeat offenders decreased for all areas examined. The percentages recorded in Table 13 represent the percentage of repeat offenders in each of the listed subgroups. When examining the number of offenders and percentages, the number of male repeat offenders comprises the vast majority of the total number of repeat offenders. Although the number of male repeat offenders decreased, their percentage of the total number of offenders increased from 75% of the total to 78% of the total. While the district is making great headway with decreasing the number of repeat offenders, male offenders are much more prevalent. When examining percentages for ethnicity, while the number of offenders is decreasing for each subgroup, the percentage of Black repeat offenders is the highest, comprising 48% of the total number of repeat offenders, followed by the White subgroup at 33.7%.

Table 13

Discipline Repeat Offenders by Gender and Ethnicity

	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender						
Female	38	25	27	26	23	22
Male	115	75	76	74	81	78
Total	153		103		104	
Ethnicity						
Asian	0	0	0	0	1	1.0
Black	70	45.8	49	47.6	50	48
Hispanic	23	15	13	12.6	13	12.5
American Indian	1	0.7	0	0	0	0
Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0
Multi-Racial	6	3.9	8	7.8	5	4.8
White	53	34.6	33	32	35	33.7

A paired sample t test was conducted for repeat offender data. Table 14 displays the results. There was not a significant difference between the baseline year, 2016-2017, and 2 years after implementation, 2018-2019. Although there was not a significant result, the data are trending to significance, decreasing from 0.105 to 0.085 over the 2-year implementation period.

Table 14

Paired Sample t Test of Repeat Offenders

School year	T	Df	p	Mean difference
2016-2017 v. 2017-2018	1.908	6	0.105	3.744
2017-2018 v. 2018-2019	0.24	6	0.818	0.595
2016-2017 v. 2018-2019	2.062	6	0.085	3.395

Summary of Results

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the district's restorative practice implementation. Quantitative data were gathered utilizing a survey and utilizing attendance and discipline data from PowerSchool, the state data management system. The survey was a Likert scale survey completed by district teachers. Qualitative data were also gathered using an open-ended question on the same survey.

Teacher perception data revealed strong teacher understanding of the purpose of restorative practices and multiple positive perceived impacts including improved student behavior, improved school climate/culture, and improved handling of conflict between students and adults. Teachers felt confident in their ability to use restorative practices in their classrooms and were overall pleased with the level of leadership support they received. Teachers listed time constraints and student attitudes as the biggest challenges with restorative practice implementation. When surveyed regarding specific restorative

practices, affective statements received markedly higher ratings than proactive circles or impromptu conferences. When asked for overall ratings, teachers rated student respect for restorative practices high, 89.8%. In contrast, when asked if their school staff would be considered a high-quality restorative staff community, the percentage was 47.5%.

When examining attendance data, a statistically significant change was noted for attendance. The overall attendance rate steadily increased each year of implementation. When examining discipline data, there were mixed results. Although there was not a statistically significant difference in the number of offenders, there was an overall decrease in the number of unique offenders and a decrease in the number of instructional days lost. When examining the number of repeat offenders, the number of repeat offenders decreased over the 2-year period. Although the decrease did not show statistical significance, repeat offenders had steadily decreased over the 2-year period. Data gathered through this mixed methods study are used in Chapter 5 to discuss strengths and further areas of development for the district's restorative practice initiative.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

School suspensions have numerous negative effects including increased chronic absenteeism, a higher incidence of dropout, involvement in the juvenile justice system, and an increased likelihood of being arrested (Lamont, 2013; Mittleman, 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2014; Whitford et al., 2016). In addition, large disparities exist in the number of suspensions for White students and students of color (USDOE, 2019). Given these adverse effects of suspension and the disproportionate equity data related to school suspension, the district of focus began implementing restorative practices in an effort to decrease the number of suspensions. The district of focus has as its goal to reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions by 5% by the year 2022 and 10% by the year 2025.

This mixed methods study focused on the impact of restorative practice implementation in one small, rural district. The study examined teacher perceptions surrounding the implementation of restorative practices. In addition, the study examined the effect of the implementation of restorative practices measured using discipline and attendance data for 3 consecutive years. Data prior to the implementation of restorative practices were compared to data after restorative practice implementation. In this chapter, major findings of the study, implications for practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

The chapter contains future research opportunities and discussion to help answer the following research questions:

1. What are teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in

a small, rural district?

2. What is the impact of the use of restorative practices in a small, rural district?

Summary of Results and Major Findings

There are multiple positive effects associated with restorative practices. With the implementation of restorative practices, one goal is for students and school staff to learn how their actions affect others and to learn to take responsibility for their actions and behavior. Students and staff should develop more positive relationships as a result of examining their own actions and the results of those actions. Proactive restorative practices, such as affective statements and proactive circles, help students build relationships with each other and staff, thus helping to prevent negative behaviors. These proactive practices address the behaviors before they happen or before they escalate to an offense that could result in a suspension. The data in this study show that the district of focus was successful in building staff capacity to implement restorative practices and experienced multiple positive effects as a result, including increased attendance and decreased suspensions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 examined teacher perceptions about the implementation of restorative practices in the district. Teacher confidence and understanding were examined. In addition, teacher-perceived impacts on suspension, student behavior, and school culture/climate were studied. Finally, teacher perceptions of the level of leadership support, challenges with restorative practice implementation, and perceptions regarding the use of restorative practices were examined for the district of focus.

Teacher Confidence and Understanding. District teachers were surveyed about

their perception of the worth of restorative practices, their confidence with restorative practice methods, and their ability to implement restorative practices. When examining all teacher confidence data, teachers were overwhelmingly confident in their understanding of restorative practices and their ability to utilize restorative practices in their classrooms with their students. When surveyed about their confidence level, 89.8% of teachers indicated they were confident in their ability to use restorative practices in their classrooms. In addition, 78% of teachers indicated a strong understanding of the different restorative practice methods, including affective statements, proactive circles, and impromptu conferences.

Confidence and understanding data provide strong evidence of successful district training. The teacher understanding data indicate that district training was effective with regard to teachers understanding the different restorative practice methods and the purpose of the methods. Even when given the option, no teachers indicated they did not understand restorative practices. When considering teacher implementation of restorative practices, the data demonstrate district implementation was successful. Teachers understood the purpose of restorative practices, understood the methods, and could implement the methods in their classrooms. Teacher confidence and understanding data indicate the district was successful in building teacher capacity for implementing restorative practices in their classrooms.

Perceived Impacts on Suspensions, Student Behavior, and Culture/Climate.

When examining teacher perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices on behavior and suspensions, the majority of respondents, 79.7%, indicated their belief that restorative practices had improved student behavior and decreased suspensions. Teachers

indicated that some behaviors that received a suspension previously did not receive a suspension after restorative practices, while certain offenses still received a suspension. Again, these data provide evidence of a strong district implementation.

Teacher perceptions of the impact on culture and climate indicate the majority of teachers agree that restorative practices had a positive impact on their school's culture/climate. The way students and adults handled conflict had improved due to restorative practice implementation. Teacher perception data indicated a strong correlation between the increase in the culture/climate of their school and the implementation of restorative practices, with 83.1% indicating the culture/climate had improved as a result of restorative practices.

Level of Leadership Support. School leaders in the district, principals, assistant principals, instructional facilitators, and guidance counselors, received restorative practice training and, in turn, facilitated training at their respective schools. Teachers indicated they received strong support from the principal and the school leadership team during the implementation of restorative practices. Teachers indicated they were provided information and training on restorative practices, had their specific questions answered, and were able to observe a member of the leadership team modeling restorative practices. In addition, when asked about several different challenges with implementation, discussed in the next section, lack of leadership support was ranked lowest on the predetermined challenge list. Teachers were comfortable with and pleased with the level of support they received from district leaders.

Challenges With Implementation. District teachers ranked multiple challenges to district implementation (see Table 2). As ranked by teacher respondents, the biggest

challenge with implementation in the district was time constraints, followed by student attitudes.

Use of Restorative Practices. Teachers were asked about their usage and understanding of different restorative practices: affective statements, proactive circles, and impromptu conferences. Restorative language in the form of affective statements was the most widely used practice, followed by impromptu conferences. Proactive circles were used least often. Affective statements are a way to communicate to another person whose behavior has affected you. These statements can be easily woven into daily activities and conversations. With time surfacing as the biggest challenge to implementation, this is a logical result. Impromptu conferences ranked second for usage. Impromptu conferences are reactive measures, used after an offense has occurred, requiring additional time to discuss the incident and bring forward potential solutions to the incident. Proactive circles are proactive measures and are used in an attempt to prevent incidents before they happen. Proactive circles allow for relationship building and establishing a sense of community. These circles require additional time, as teachers must plan an activity to use and take time to facilitate the circle.

Research Question 2

District data were examined to determine the impact of restorative practices on student attendance, suspensions, instructional days lost, and repeat offenders. Analysis of district data, disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity, were utilized to answer Research Question 2.

Attendance Data Results. With each year of implementation, the mean for attendance increased. From the baseline year to 2 years after implementation, the overall

attendance mean increased 1.76%. In addition, the paired sample *t* test revealed a significant difference in attendance rate between the baseline year and 2 years after restorative practice implementation (see Table 4). Attendance rates increased for male and female students and students in the Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, and Two or More ethnicity subgroups. Surprisingly, there was not an increase in attendance for the American Indian/Alaskan Native or White subgroups.

Discipline Data Results. The number of out-of-school suspensions in the district was analyzed including the number of offenders, mean, and standard deviation. The suspension data disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity were also examined. When considering the discipline data results, the data were promising with a decrease in the mean, standard deviation, and the number of offenders (see Table 7).

When analyzing the discipline data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, no discernable pattern emerged. For gender, percentages remained much the same with an increase of 1% for females and a decrease of 1% for males. For ethnicity, the Black, Hispanic, and White subgroups showed a decrease in the number of offenders.

A paired sample *t* test of discipline offenders was conducted and revealed no significant difference between the baseline year and 2 years after restorative practice implementation; however, there was a positive trajectory leading toward significance.

When examining disparities in discipline, there was no significant improvement. Only the Hispanic and White subgroups experienced a decrease in suspension percentage. The Black subgroup represented 20% of the population but experienced 41.6% of the out-of-school suspensions in the district, up from 38.2% in the baseline year. The Hispanic subgroup represented 32% of the district population and made up 20.8% of the out-of-

school suspensions, down from 23% in the baseline year. The White subgroup represented 40% of the overall population but 31.1% of the suspensions, down from 35% in the baseline year.

When examining district data, the decreases in out-of-school suspensions were expected. Although there were no statistically significant results, suspension numbers decreased each year. With more years of implementation, if the trend continues, one would expect statistically significant future results.

Instructional Days Lost. The number of days of instruction lost as a result of out-of-school suspensions was examined, including the mean, standard deviation, and data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. The mean decreased by 81.47 days. The number of days lost for female students increased by 4%, while the number of days lost by males decreased by 4%. The number of days lost due to suspension decreased for the Black, Hispanic, and American Indian subgroups.

Repeat Offender Results. The number of repeat offenders was examined to determine if restorative practices affected future suspensions. Repeat offender data were disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. The recidivism rate provided strong, positive implementation data for the district. The number of repeat offenders decreased each year of implementation. In addition, the number of repeat offenders decreased for every area examined, gender (see Table 12) and ethnicity (see Table 13). While the number of offenders decreased for each subgroup examined, the highest percentage of repeat offenders was in the Black subgroup, comprising 48% of the total number of repeat offenders, followed by the White subgroup at 33.7%.

Data in this study did not reveal restorative practices that would work for certain

subgroups as opposed to other subgroups. No data gathered would allow conclusions to be formed regarding differentiating restorative practices based on subgroups.

Implications

Given the positive results after the implementation of restorative practices in the district, the impact of restorative practices is promising for improving school culture/climate, increasing attendance, addressing discipline disparities, decreasing suspensions, decreasing the number of instructional days lost, and decreasing the number of repeat offenders. The following recommendations are provided for the district of focus and for other districts considering implementing restorative practices.

- Provide professional development for all new staff and ongoing training for existing staff. It is important for staff to be properly trained to implement restorative practices. Proper training helps to facilitate teacher confidence and usage of restorative practices. District teacher confidence and understanding data correlate with the Augustine et al. (2018) study findings which highlight the importance of teacher training. Augustine et al. found that teachers who were trained and understood the essential elements of restorative practices were more likely to implement and utilize the practices with their students. Perception data make it clear that district teachers were effectively trained and therefore comfortable implementing the practices with their students. Rainbolt et al. (2019) found onboarding new staff and providing ongoing training were essential to ensure all staff were committed to the project. While data make it clear that the district provided sufficient training, the district should continue with training initiatives to ensure new staff are trained and have the same

understanding and confidence with restorative practices and the different methods. Staff who have been trained should receive ongoing professional development that reviews needed information to ensure restorative practices continue to be utilized. Expectations should be set at the district level regarding restorative practice implementation and mandatory professional development to ensure the work continues. Restorative practice work could continue with training provided during weekly professional learning community meetings. Districts seeking to implement restorative practices should ensure all staff are thoroughly trained so they are comfortable with the implementation and will implement and utilize the different methods to benefit students and the district. In addition, the district of focus and other districts seeking to implement restorative practice initiatives should consider providing an experienced coach to each school. Augustine et al. found that utilizing an external restorative practice coach provided many benefits. External coaches provided objective feedback and modeling based on their personal experiences. Staff who interacted and were trained by the external coaches were more likely to use restorative practices.

- Share the research related to restorative practices and why restorative practices are needed. Rainbolt et al. (2019) found that staff felt it was essential that all staff knew the reasons why a restorative practice initiative was being implemented and the benefits of undertaking such an initiative. For effective implementation, as part of initial training, districts should ensure staff know the research associated with restorative practices and why the work is

important. In addition to research explaining the benefits of restorative practices, the district of focus should share the findings of this study with staff. Teachers in the district indicated student behavior had improved and school culture/climate had improved. These findings are consistent with findings from several previous studies. Augustine et al. (2018) found restorative practices helped teachers build stronger relationships with students and each other and helped to create a positive atmosphere in the school. Further, Ortega et al. (2016) reported improved relationships, and Schumacher (2014) found multiple interpersonal growth skills as positive effects of restorative practices. In addition, staff in the district should review attendance and discipline data from this study as part of ongoing training. The improvements realized in the district will help to provide staff with a sense of purpose for restorative practices work, helping them to see the benefits.

- Ensure school leaders are thoroughly trained and able to implement restorative practice work. Data for the district of focus provide evidence of strong leadership support and knowledge. In the Augustine et al. (2018) study, having leaders who coordinated the work and understood and modeled restorative practices was found to be instrumental in a successful restorative practice implementation. The district of focus should continue to train new administrators to implement and continue the work but should also provide scheduled refresher training for existing administrators to help maintain their skills. Districts interested in implementing restorative practice work should ensure all leaders are thoroughly trained and able to teach the practices,

provide feedback on practice usage, and model restorative practices.

- Teachers expressed time as a barrier to restorative practice implementation. This finding is consistent with findings from the Ortega et al. (2016) study where teachers expressed frustration caused by the lack of time available to utilize restorative practices to build relationships with students. To address this concern, districts can utilize restorative practices that are easily implemented during daily instruction such as affective statements and equitable practices. In addition, the district of focus has an established intervention time included in the daily schedule. Restorative practices that need additional time, i.e., circles and conferences, could take place during the intervention time. If part of the intervention time was dedicated to behavioral interventions, restorative practices could be implemented with fidelity without compromising core instructional time.
- Teachers further expressed concern with student attitudes toward restorative practices. Student attitudes were ranked second, after time constraints, as a challenge to the implementation of restorative practices. This finding is also consistent with the Ortega et al. (2016) study which found negative student attitudes as a barrier to implementation. To address this concern, the district of focus and other districts looking to implement restorative practices should consider Ortega et al.'s recommendation to improve student attitudes and participation, namely making student participation in the process voluntary. If students participate voluntarily, they are more likely to engage in the process and are less likely to view the process as punishment.

- Utilize proactive restorative practices. In the district of focus, data showed proactive circles were used least often. It is somewhat concerning that circles were used least often. A study from High (2017) found that utilizing proactive circles builds student emotional health and strengthens the sense of community in the classroom and the school. As part of ongoing implementation, the district should consider a focus on increasing the use of proactive circles. Proactive circles help to improve student social and emotional competence in response to conflict or wrongdoing, helping to avoid future offenses (High, 2017). If teachers and staff utilize proactive circles, future offenses could be avoided. Districts that choose to implement restorative practices should ensure there are proactive practices included in the implementation, as proactive measures assist students with emotional regulation. The goal of proactive measures is to prevent future wrongdoing. As such, utilizing proactive measures could prevent further infractions.
- Districts should utilize surveys to examine perception data for teachers and students. Attendance and culture/climate findings in the district were positive and encouraging. These findings are consistent with the findings in the Atwell and Bridgeland (2019) study. Over half of those surveyed indicated restorative practices would have a major benefit of reducing absenteeism; improving relationships between teachers and students; improving relationships among students; and having a decline in bullying, an increase in student safety, and an increase in student engagement in school. In addition, Schumacher (2014) found an increase in emotional literacy with students who participated in

restorative practices including learning to listen, anger management, nurturing empathy, and developing interpersonal thoughtfulness. In the district of focus, teacher perception data, discussed previously, revealed an increase in positive relationships and a more positive culture/climate as a result of restorative practices. One would expect improvements in attendance if climate and culture improve and students experience more positive relationships with their teachers and with each other. Given the impact on attendance with the implementation of restorative practices, the district should continue to teach and utilize the practices to benefit students and schools in the district.

- Districts looking to implement or implementing restorative practices should monitor discipline data frequently. Districts should have a way to monitor and examine discipline incidents, major and minor infractions, and the response to or consequence for those infractions. The district of focus experienced a decrease in suspensions after restorative practice implementation. The decrease in suspensions was expected as previous studies had proven results for decreasing suspensions (Armour, 2014; Augustine et al., 2018; Carroll, 2017; Gonzalez, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2018; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). One of the noticeable differences in the results of this study, as compared to the Stinchcomb et al. (2006) study, was the lack of policy change with regard to suspension. In the Stinchcomb et al. study, the number of out-of-school suspensions decreased in part due to a policy change forbidding out-of-school suspension for certain offenses. In the district of focus, there was no such policy change. The use of restorative practices was the precipitating factor

with regard to the reduction of out-of-school suspensions. The district should continue to implement restorative practices with a focus on decreasing the disparate discipline data with regard to male students and Black students.

Although suspension numbers decreased, there is still needed work to address the number of suspensions for Black students and male students. Districts looking to implement restorative practices to decrease suspensions should not issue a no suspension mandate. Doing so would taint district data related to suspensions. With such a mandate, it would be impossible to measure the impact of the restorative practice implementation.

- Ensure that restorative practices are widespread across all schools and all grade levels. The district of focus had disparate data with regard to suspensions. The results of this study align with the results of the Anyon et al. (2016) study where disparities in suspension data persisted for Black students. Anyon et al. suggested that restorative practice implementation would need to be much more prevalent to eliminate or decrease disparities. In addition, Gregory et al. (2016) found that teachers with higher restorative practice implementation rates had fewer referrals for Latinx and African American students. District leaders should ensure that restorative practices are being implemented in every school and every classroom. Districts need to track teacher usage to ensure all teachers are utilizing restorative practice methods.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- This study took place in a small, rural district, thus the scope of the study was

limited. The data used to examine the quantitative results of the study were based on a small district with 11 schools and approximately 3,600 students.

- The sample size was small for the qualitative survey data with only 59 teachers completing the survey. Given this small sample size, it is difficult to generalize these data to other settings.
- The district of focus had no formal program for the implementation of restorative practices. As a result, other districts may find it difficult to replicate the results.
- In this study, there was no way to determine how many teachers implemented restorative practices, or to what extent.
- Data were unavailable to determine which restorative practices were successful for certain subgroups. Since those data were not collected, it is impossible to determine the practices that benefit particular subgroups of students.
- Data were disaggregated by gender and ethnicity only. Data were not collected for other subgroups: English language learners, economically disadvantaged, homeless, students with disabilities, etc.
- The timing of the study could be considered a limitation. The district began implementing restorative practices during the 2017-2018 school year. The study took place during the 2020-2021 school year. I hoped to use 3 full years of implementation data; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in the district were virtual from March 2020 to March 2021. Since school was held virtually for the last 3 months of the third year of implementation, only

data from the first 2 years of implementation were utilized. In addition, the teacher survey took place at the end of the fourth year of implementation, utilizing teachers who taught in the district during the first 2 years of implementation. Although the study focused on the first 2 years of implementation, teachers made multiple references to the impact of the COVID-19 school closure.

- Because of the COVID-19 school closure, academic data could not be examined. It was not possible to examine the impact of restorative practices on student achievement.
- The study only examined three restorative practice methods. It is difficult to determine if the teacher perception results would apply to other methods.
- This study did not examine the impact by grade level or by school level: elementary, middle, and high. It is difficult to determine if restorative practices benefit one grade level or school level more than another.

Recommendations for Future Evaluation and Research

The study sought to determine the impact of the implementation of restorative practices. The results of this study are promising, demonstrating multiple positive benefits. When examining the results, the following recommendations are made for future research:

1. The study was limited to one small, rural district. Replicating the study in multiple small districts could add validity to the results.
2. The study examined school system data over multiple years. The body of research for restorative practices could be strengthened if a cohort of students

was examined over multiple years of restorative practice implementation.

Examining attendance and discipline data over time for a particular cohort would provide specific information regarding subgroups, grade levels, etc.

3. Future researchers may find it advantageous to engage stakeholders in interviews and focus groups. A qualitative study examining student perspectives and further examining teacher perspectives would add to the body of research.
4. Additional analysis of different subgroups may provide further findings on the implementation of restorative practices. For example, examining economically disadvantaged students, homeless students, students with disabilities, and/or English language learners would add another layer of depth to the study.
5. With a decrease in suspensions, students have more instructional time. With additional class time, examining achievement data over multiple years of restorative practice implementation would further the body of knowledge.
6. Analyzing data for different school levels, elementary, middle, and high, would provide additional data for which restorative practices showed the greatest promise at which level.
7. Comparing data from a small district that is not utilizing restorative practices with a small district that is implementing restorative practices would also further the body of research.

Conclusion

As part of the strategic plan of the district of focus, a goal was established to

decrease the number of suspensions. To assist in meeting the goal, staff were trained, and restorative practices were implemented. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the district's restorative practice implementation. Quantitative data were gathered utilizing a survey and attendance and discipline data. Qualitative data were gathered using an open-ended question on the survey. The results of the study indicate strong district implementation of restorative practices with multiple positive results.

Data revealed multiple positive impacts of restorative practice implementation. Teacher perception data indicate successful training, revealing a strong teacher understanding of the elements of restorative practices. In addition, teachers indicated multiple positive perceived impacts including improved student behavior, improved school climate, and improved handling of student behavior. Teachers further indicated strong confidence levels when describing their ability to utilize restorative practices. Another positive outcome was the level of leadership support. Teachers indicated strong support from leadership. The district should continue to train new administrators to ensure the level of leadership support remains consistent. When examining specific restorative practices, affective statements received the highest ratings for understanding and usage, followed by restorative circles and impromptu conferences. Time was the number one constraint identified for implementing restorative practices. District administrators should ensure there is time included in the school day for restorative practice implementation, potentially the intervention block that is already a requirement. Given the proven benefits of restorative practices, the time invested would net many positive results.

When examining district attendance and discipline data, multiple positive impacts

were revealed. There was a statistically significant change in overall attendance rate, with the overall attendance rate steadily increasing with each year of implementation. Also, although there was not a statistically significant difference in the number of offenders, there was a decrease in the number of unique offenders and instructional days lost. Further, there was a decrease in the number of repeat offenders. Although the decrease was not statistically significant, repeat offenders steadily decreased with each year of implementation.

The district of focus saw multiple positive benefits with each year of the implementation of restorative practices. The district should continue a focus on restorative practices, ensuring training for new employees, to ensure continued improvement in attendance and suspensions. Based on the results of the district's implementation, districts seeking to decrease suspensions and repeat offenders, increase attendance, and improve school climate would be well served to implement restorative practices.

References

- Abbott, M., & McKinney, J. (2012). *Understanding and applying research design*. Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- The Advancement Project. (2014). *Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships and promoting positive discipline in schools: A Guide for educators*. Schott Foundation.
- The Advancement Project. (2021). Mission and vision.
<https://advancementproject.org/about-advancement-project/>
- Anyon, Y., Gregory, A., Stone, S., Farrar, J., Jenson, J. M., Mcqueen, J., Downing, B., Greer, E., & Simmons, J. (2016). Restorative interventions and school discipline sanctions in a large urban school district. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(6), 1663-1697. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216675719>
- Armour, M. (2014). *North East Independent School District Ed White middle school restorative discipline evaluation: Implementation and impact, 2013/2014 sixth & seventh grade*. <http://sites.utexas.edu/irjrd/files/2016/01/Year-2-Final-EW-Report.pdf>
- Atwell, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2019). *Ready to lead: A 2019 update of principals' perspectives on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED602977.pdf>
- Augustine, C. H., Engberg, J., Grimm, G. E., Lee, E., Wang, E. L., Christianson, K., & Joseph, A. A. (2018). *Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of the impact of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2840.html

- Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V., & Fox, J. (2014). Sent home and put off-track: The antecedents, disproportionalities, and consequences of being suspended in the ninth grade. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 5(2), Article 13. <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol5/iss2/13>
- Carroll, P. (2017). *Evaluating attempts at the implementation of restorative justice in three alternative education high schools* (Publication No. 10619153) [Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Merced]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (n.d.). *Fundamentals of SEL*. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>
- Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M. P., & Booth, E. A. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement*. https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Breaking_Schools_Rules_Report_Final.pdf
- Fronius, T., Darling-Hammond, S., Persson, H., Guckenburg, S., Hurley, N., & Petrosino, A. (2019, March). *Restorative justice in U.S. schools: An updated research review*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED595733.pdf>
- Goldys, P. H. (2016). Restorative practices from candy and punishment to celebrations and problem-solving circles. *Journal of Character Education*, 12(1), 75.
- Gonzalez, T. (2012). Keeping kids in schools: Restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school to prison pipeline. *Journal of Law & Education*, 41(2), 281.
- Gonzalez, J. (2020, June 13). *Restorative justice in school: An overview*. Cult of Pedagogy. <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/restorative-justice-overview/>

- Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2016). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 325–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2014.929950>
- Gregory, A., Huang, F. L., Anyon, Y., Greer, E., & Downing, B. (2018). An examination of restorative interventions and racial equity in out-of-school suspensions. *School Psychology Review*, 47(2), 167–182. <https://doi.org/10.17105/spr-2017-0073.v47-2>
- High, A. J. (2017). Using restorative practices to teach and uphold dignity in an American school district. *McGill Journal of Education (Online)*, 52(2), 525-534.
- IIRP. (n.d.). *Defining restorative 5.2. circles*. IIRP. <https://www.iirp.edu/defining-restorative/5-2-circles>
- Katic, B. (2017). Restorative justice practices in education: A quantitative analysis of suspension rates at the middle school level. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1567&context=etd>
- Kirn, J. (2020, February 16). *ABA roadmaps way to turn off spigot to school-to-prison pipeline*. American Bar Association. <https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2020/02/aba-roadmaps-way-to-turn-off-spigot-to-school-to-prison-pipeline/>
- Lamont, J. H. (2013). Policy statement: Out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *Pediatrics*, 131(3). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-3932>

- Losen, D. J., & Martinez, P. (2020, October). *Lost opportunities. How disparate school discipline continues to drive differences in the opportunity to learn.*
http://www.schooldisciplinedata.org/ccrr/docs/Lost%20Opportunities_EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY.pdf
- Mansfield, K. C., Fowler, B., & Rainbolt, S. (2018). The potential of restorative practices to ameliorate discipline gaps: The story of one high school's leadership team. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(2), 303-323.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x17751178>
- Mansfield, K., Rainbolt, S., & Fowler, B. (2016, Nov. 18). *Re-envisioning discipline in complex contexts: An appreciative inquiry of one district's restorative discipline practice* [Conference presentation]. University Council for Educational Administration Annual Convention, Detroit, MI.
- Marsh, V. L. (2017, June). *Restorative practices research reports*. Restorative Solutions.
<http://restorativesolutions.us/resources/restorative-practices-research>
- McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Riddell, S., Stead, J., & Weedon, E. (2008). Can restorative practices in schools make a difference? *Educational Review (Birmingham)*, 60(4), 405–417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910802393456>
- McCold, P. (2016, May 31). *Evaluation of a restorative milieu: CSF Buxmont School/day treatment programs 1999-2001, Evaluation outcome technical report*. IIRP.
<https://www.iirp.edu/news/evaluation-of-a-restorative-milieu-csf-buxmont-school-day-treatment-programs-1999-2001-evaluation-outcome-technical-report>
- Mittleman, J. (2018). *A school-to-prison pipeline? Exclusionary discipline and the production of delinquency*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/28qk4>

- Montgomery County Public Schools. (2010, August). *A resource for equitable classroom practices 2010*. Montgomery County Public Schools, Equity Initiatives Unit, Office of Human Resources and Development, Maryland. ECP - 08-13-10.
<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/development/resources/ecp/ECP%20-%2008-13-10.pdf>
- Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2016). The punishment gap: School suspension and racial disparities in achievement. *Social Problems (Berkeley, Calif.)*, 63(1), 68–86.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spv026>
- Nelson, L., & Lind, D. (2015, February 24). *The school to prison pipeline, explained: Police officers in classrooms are just the tip of the iceberg*. Justice Policy Institute.
<http://www.justicepolicy.org/news/8775>
- Noltemeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & McLoughlin, C. (2015). Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review*, 44(2), 224–240. <https://doi.org/10.17105/spr-14-0008.1>
- Ortega, L., Lyubansky, M., Nettles, S., & Espelage, D. L. (2016). Outcomes of a restorative circles program in a high school setting. *Psychology of Violence*, 6(3), 459-468. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000048>
- Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion. (2013, February 25). American Academy of Pediatrics.
<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2013/02/20/peds.2012-3932.full.pdf>

Paget, A., Parker, C., Heron, J., Logan, S., Henley, W., Emond, A., & Ford, T. (2017).

Which children and young people are excluded from school? Findings from a large British birth cohort study, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC). *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 44(2), 285–296.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12525>

Public School Forum of North Carolina. (2018). *Accountability*.

http://www.ncforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Accountability_2018.pdf

Rainbolt, S., Fowler, E. S., & Mansfield, K. C. (2019). High school teachers' perceptions of restorative discipline practices. *NASSP Bulletin*, 103(2), 158–182.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636519853018>

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly Consolidated Data Report 2018-2019.

CDR Report B4 Merge. (2020, March 15).

https://files.nc.gov/dpi/documents/consolidated-reports/2018-19_cdr-report-2018-2019-final-20200302.pdf

Rumberger, R. W., & Losen, D. J. (2016). *The high cost of harsh discipline and its disparate impact*. <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/the-high-cost-of-harsh-discipline-and-its-disparate-impact>

Schiff, M. (2018). Can restorative justice disrupt the “school-to-prison pipeline?”

Contemporary Justice Review, 21(2), 121–139.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2018.1455509>

- Schumacher, A. (2014). Talking circles for adolescent girls in an urban high school: A restorative practices program for building friendships and developing emotional literacy skills. *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014554204>
- Short, R., Case, G., & McKenzie, K. (2018). The long-term impact of a whole school approach of restorative practice: The views of secondary school teachers. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 36(4) 313–324.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2018.1528625>
- Skiba, R. J., Chung, C.-G., Trachok, M., Baker, T. L., Sheya, A., & Hughes, R. L. (2014). Parsing disciplinary disproportionality. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(4), 640–670. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214541670>
- Stern, L. (2020, June 19). *Restorative justice: A new approach to discipline*. Spare the Rod | APM Reports. <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2016/08/25/restorative-justice-school-discipline>
- Stinchcomb, J. B., Bazemore, G., & Riestenberg, N. (2006). Beyond zero tolerance: Restoring justice in secondary schools. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 4(2), 123–147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204006286287>
- Taherdoost, H. (2016). Sampling methods in research methodology: How to choose a sampling technique for research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 5(2), 18-27.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2019, January). Chronic absenteeism in the nation's schools. <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>

- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights. (2019). *2015-2016 Civil rights data collection school climate and safety*. U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf>
- Wachtel, T. (2016). *Defining restorative*. International Institute for Restorative Practices. www.iirp.edu/images/pdf/Defining-Restorative_Nov-2016.pdf
- Weaver, J. L., & Swank, J. M. (2020). A case study of the implementation of restorative justice in a middle school. *RMLE Online*, 43(4) 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2020.1733912>
- Whitford, D. K., Katsiyannis, A., & Counts, J. (2016). Discriminatory discipline. *NASSP Bulletin*, 100(2), 117–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636516677340>

Appendix A

Survey

Restorative Practices Teacher Survey

A survey examining teacher perceptions of the impact of restorative practices in one school district. Teacher participation is voluntary. Teachers who were employed in the district during the 17-18 and/or the 18-19 school year should complete the survey.

* Required

1. Please select the year(s) you taught in this district. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ I taught in this district during the 2017-2018 school year.
- ☐ I taught in this district during the 2018-2019 school year.
- ☐ I taught in the district during both the 2017-2018 and the 2018-2019 school years.

2. You indicated that you are a classroom teacher. Please select all the grades you currently work with below.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Pre-K
- ☐ K
- ☐ 1st Grade
- ☐ 2nd Grade
- ☐ 3rd Grade
- ☐ 4th Grade
- ☐ 5th Grade
- ☐ 6th Grade
- ☐ 7th Grade
- ☐ 8th Grade
- ☐ 9th Grade
- ☐ 10th Grade
- ☐ 11th Grade
- ☐ 12th Grade

3. Please provide your total years as a teacher, irrespective of location.

4.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. *

Check all that apply.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that restorative practices can help to improve student behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The majority of staff in this school believes that restorative practices can help improve student behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning restorative practices is worth my time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting restorative practices is worthwhile for my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am confident that I know the purpose of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am confident that I know the restorative practice methods.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am confident in my ability to use restorative practices with the majority of students in my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student behavior in my school has improved as a result of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school culture/climate has improved as a result of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The way that students handle conflicts with adults has improved as a result of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The way that students handle conflict with other students has improved as a result of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The way that adults handle conflicts with other adults has improved as a result of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Please indicate to what extent to which you feel you understand the elements of restorative practices.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ I do not understand restorative practices.
- ☐ I know what some of the element are, but I could not define them.
- ☐ I know the elements of restorative practices.
- ☐
- ☐

I know the elements of restorative practices and could explain them to a peer.

I could train another person to use the elements of restorative practices.

6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: The same behaviors that received a suspension before restorative practices also receive a suspension now.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ No, behaviors that resulted in a suspension before restorative practices are not receiving suspensions now.
- ☐ No, behaviors that did not result in a suspension before restorative practices are receiving suspensions now.
- ☐ I did not work at this school prior to the implementation of restorative practices.

7. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. *

Check all that apply.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am confident in my ability to use restorative practices in my classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student behavior in my classroom has improved as a result of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In my classroom(s), culture/climate has improved as a result of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. My school's principal and school leadership team provided the following support.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Providing general information about restorative practices.
- ☐ Answering specific questions about implementing restorative practices.
- ☐ Modeling restorative practices.
- ☐ Providing feedback based on observing my use of restorative practices.
- ☐ I did not receive any support from the leadership team.

Other: ☐ _____

9. Please check the factors that represent the most significant challenges you have faced to date in implementing restorative practices. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Time constraints
- ☐ Lack of buy-in/belief RP can work
- ☐ Limited training (training not sufficient for implementation)
- ☐ Lack of administrative support
- ☐ Student attitudes
- ☐ Unclear discipline policy (unsure how RP fits into discipline policy)
- ☐ Lack of understanding of expectations
- ☐ Leadership/staff turnover

Other: ☐ _____

10. Please indicate the frequency of the following statements as they apply to AFFECTIVE STATEMENTS: *

Affective statements are personal expressions of how a positive or negative behavior has affected you.

Check all that apply.

	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I use affective statements informally throughout the day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use "I" statements to express my feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students use "I" statements to express their feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I actively encourage students to express their feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students use affective statements to express how they are impacted by others' behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When providing positive or negative feedback, I identify specific and concrete behaviors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I deliver feedback in a personalized manner directly to the student who impacted others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I distinguish the deed from the doer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affective statements are a part of "how we do things" at our school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. My colleagues use affective statements. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Always

Unsure

12. This question asks about PROACTIVE CIRCLES. For your reference, proactive circles are ritualistic relationship-building activities with clear expectations, done in a circle configuration. Topics include goal setting, academic content, classroom norms, behavioral expectations, and other 'fun' topics. How many proactive circles have you run per week, on average, over the entire school year? *
-

13. My colleagues use small proactive circles.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Not at all
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Always
☐ Unsure

14. Proactive circles are a part of "how we do things" at our school. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Not at all
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Always

15. Please indicate the frequency of the following statements as they apply to PROACTIVE CIRCLES: *

Proactive circles (social circles) are ritualistic relationship-building activities with clear expectations, done in a circle configuration.

Check all that apply.

	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I use circles to provide opportunities for students to share feelings, ideas, and experiences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In a given week, I hold more proactive circles than responsive circles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the circles, only one person speaks at a time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the circles, participants are focused on an explicit topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I model desired behaviors and responses for the participants within the circle.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I set a positive tone when I begin the circle.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am ready with a response to participants who ask to 'pass'.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sit in the circle.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I pick topics that encourage risk taking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. This question refers to IMPROMPTU CONFERENCES. For your reference, small impromptu conferences/conversations are questioning exercises designed to resolve lower-level incidents before they escalate. These are help spontaneously or with little planning. How many impromptu conferences have you run per week, on average, over the entire school year? *

17. My colleagues use small impromptu conferences.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Not at all
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Always
☐ Unsure

18. Small impromptu conferences are a part of "how we do things" at our school.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Not at all
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Always

19. Please indicate the frequency of the following statements as they apply to IMPROMPTU CONFERENCES: *
Check all that apply.

	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
When addressing misbehavior between students, I structure the conversation using restorative questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I facilitate a small impromptu conference when a lower level incident occurs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When facilitating a small impromptu conference, I encourage students to do most of the thinking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I encourage students to use affective statements in response to the restorative questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I ask students to take specific actions to repair the harm.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use a respectful tone and avoid lecturing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Please indicate the frequency of the following statements as they apply to your STAFF COMMUNITY: *

Check all that apply.

	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I use affective statements with other staff members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use restorative questions to resolve staff conflicts and repair harm done to staff relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We use proactive circles to build a healthy staff community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We use responsive circles to deal with conflicts that arise among staff members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school administration models restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a staff we meet the criteria of a high quality restorative staff community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Please indicate your perceptions on how students feel about restorative practices. *

Check all that apply.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students generally enjoy proactive circles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students engage with the restorative questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students seem to understand the goal of restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students seem to respect restorative practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. What additional information would you like to share regarding restorative practices in your school or classroom that you were unable to report via the survey questions?

Appendix B
Survey Permission

Re: [EXT] Request to Use Survey

From: Augustine, Catherine <cataug@rand.org>
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 12:17 PM
To: Carla Miller <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: [EXT] Request to Use Survey

Sure, please go ahead. And good luck!

From: Carla Miller <carla.miller@[REDACTED]>
Date: Sunday, November 29, 2020 at 9:25 PM
To: "Augustine, Catherine" <cataug@rand.org>
Subject: [EXT] Request to Use Survey

Dr. Augustine,

My name is Carla Miller and I am currently working on my dissertation with Gardner Webb University in Boiling Springs, NC. I am pursuing my doctorate in Educational Leadership. My study, *An Evaluation of the Implementation and Impact of Restorative Practices in a Small, Rural District*, will examine teacher perceptions of the impact of restorative practices. The district of focus is a small district with only 10 schools in a rural area.

I am looking for a survey to use to survey the teachers in the district and wanted to ask about the possibility of using parts of the survey used in your study, *Can Restorative Practices Improve School Climate and Curb Suspensions?* The district of focus for my study did not use the IIRP SaferSaner Schools program, so some of the questions would not apply. The district did not use a formal program. I would like to use specifically questions 6-13, 36, 37, 43, and 47-54 of the Year 1 survey.

I appreciate your consideration. Please let me know if there is additional information that you need. If it is not possible to use your survey, if you know of another suitable survey, I would appreciate your input.

Sincerely,

Carla Miller

Appendix C

District Permission

District Data Request Form

Date:

Name:

Email:

Phone Number:

University Name:

University Sponsor/Chair/Advisor:

Request description (What type of data? For what group? Examples: Grade 8 EOG results for student's currently enrolled in Grade 9.)

Purpose of the request (How will it be used? Who is the intended audience? Examples: Capstone research project for doctoral program.):

Year(s) and semester(s) for which data is being requested (Grade 8 EOG 2016-2017 and Math I 2017-2018):

Does this request require more than one piece of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) (name, student id number, DOB, address, etc.)? Human Resources Information (i.e., individual teacher-level growth data)?

Yes___ Stop here and request a MCS Data Sharing Agreement for FERPA or Human Resources Request from Takeda LeGrand at [REDACTED]

No___ Sign and return form to Takeda LeGrand at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

MCS Administrative Section

Date Request Received:

Data Request Honored:

Sign:

Date:

CC: Dr. [REDACTED], Superintendent