In the following report, Hanover Research explores best practices in the implementation of school-wide or district-wide restorative justice programs. This report profiles districts across the country that have implemented restorative justice, with a particular focus on planning, implementation, and training.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Restorative justice (RJ) is an approach to mediating conflict in which all parties in a conflict—including the victim and the offender—discuss the harm done and develop an approach to alleviate tension.¹ Many schools across the country have implemented RJ practices, such as discussion circles and peer courts, as a way to reduce suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the juvenile justice system.² The Texas Education Agency (TEA) notes that suspensions, which disproportionately affect minority students, lead to higher dropout rates and academic failure. TEA is in the early stages of a state-wide initiative to promote restorative justice in Texas schools.³

Implementation of restorative justice throughout a school or district is a complex process that requires the support of the entire school community and the provision of opportunities for professional development. This report provides an overview of restorative justice in a school setting and explores best practices in the implementation of an effective RJ program. The report proceeds as follows:

- **Section I: Best Practices in Restorative Justice Programs** describes the purpose, structure, and practices of a school-wide RJ program, and presents expert recommendations for the effective implementation of an RJ program.
- **Section II: District Profiles** describes the experiences of ten districts that have implemented school-wide RJ programs in one or more schools.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Restorative justice**, a school-wide conflict resolution strategy that brings participants in a conflict together to identify and repair harm, leads to reduced expulsions, suspensions, and disciplinary referrals. In addition to a reduction in exclusionary discipline, students and staff at schools that implement restorative justice report improved school climate and more positive attitudes towards school and peer relationships.
- **Experts recommend that schools and districts implement restorative justice over the course of several years, to build support for the program and provide professional development.** Restorative justice requires a significant shift in school practices and attitudes towards discipline, which students and staff may initially

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resist. Districts profiled in this report chose to pilot restorative justice in a small number of schools, often starting with a single grade, before scaling up the program.

- **Successful restorative justice programs often have a strong, school-based leader who manages program implementation.** In many schools, a teacher or principal with knowledge of restorative justice works to gather buy-in from his or her colleagues to implement restorative justice. Experts emphasize that school-based restorative justice coordinators must have deep knowledge of the school and surrounding community.

- **Many school districts partner with community-based organizations to implement restorative justice and train staff.** Schools profiled in this report rely on community based organizations to provide expertise, training, management, and funding for restorative justice programs. For example, Austin ISD partners with Life Anew, a local non-profit that specializes in restorative justice, to fund a school-based facilitator who oversees training and program implementation.

- **Students should be active participants in the implementation of restorative justice.** School leaders report that the program has the greatest impact when students understand the relevance and value of the process. In some schools, students receive training to facilitate circles, conferences, and peer courts themselves.
SECTION I: BEST PRACTICES IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS

This section presents a brief overview of the purpose, structure, and practices of a school-wide or district-wide RJ program. This overview is followed by a summary of RJ program implementation best practices, as described in RJ guidance documents published by organizations that help school districts implement restorative justice.

OVERVIEW OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is an approach to conflict resolution that brings together all parties to a conflict to address harm, while giving equal attention to community safety, victims’ needs, and offender accountability and growth. Compared to traditional discipline measures, which may simply react to student behavior, restorative justice is a system-wide approach that seeks to change the school climate and improve relationships among students and staff.

PURPOSE

Originally pioneered in the criminal justice system, many school leaders now implement restorative justice as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies or exclusionary discipline practices that remove students from school for extended periods of time. Researchers argue that exclusionary discipline leads to greater student disengagement and juvenile crime, therefore contributing to what many describe as a “school-to-prison pipeline.” For example, a 2011 study found that Texas students who are suspended or expelled are five times more likely to drop out, six times more likely to repeat a grade, and three times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system within one year. In addition, the study found that African-American and Hispanic students, especially male students from these groups, are removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons at disproportionate rates.

While restorative justice is an alternative to zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline policies, it does not completely replace them. Out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, and District Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) remain an option to

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9 Ibid., p. x.
districts that implement restorative justice. However, restorative justice can be a promising practice for addressing student discipline. For example, training documents developed for the Region 13 Education Service Center in Austin encourage educators to offer restorative justice to those students who are willing to participate.  

OUTCOMES

While empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of restorative justice at reducing recidivism in the criminal justice system, research on the impact of restorative justice at the school level is limited. However, several individual school districts in Texas and across the country have reduced suspensions and discipline referrals using RJ strategies. For example, following the implementation of restorative justice at a middle school in San Antonio (profiled in Section II), the school reported fewer in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and citations for tardiness. Another study of five high schools in Pennsylvania found that in addition to reduced rates of suspensions, assaults, and fights, students who participated in RJ activities reported more positive attitudes towards their school and stronger relationships with their peers.

In addition, researchers suggest that inclusionary discipline policies address several negative behaviors associated with zero-tolerance policies, including:

- **Academic Difficulties** due to lost learning time,
- **Acting Out** caused by excluded students falling behind their peers and becoming frustrated or embarrassed in class,
- **Psychological and Mental Health Consequences** of traumatizing and alienating disciplinary procedures,
- **Truancy** caused by excluded students becoming alienated from school, and
- **Dropping Out or Being Pushed Out of School** by disciplinary policies that cause students to see themselves as not being valued by the school.

STRUCTURE AND PRACTICES

Restorative justice is a school-wide approach to positive behavior that is implemented at multiple levels, according to the behavior in question and the consequent level of harm.
An RJ program is often implemented in coordination with School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SW PBIS), a decision-making framework used to guide the selection and implementation of academic and behavioral practices that promote positive behavior outcomes.16

The school-wide RJ framework shares PBIS’s three-tiered pyramid structure, as demonstrated in Figure 1.1 on the following page.17 At the base of the pyramid are school-wide preventative practices that seek to build a cohesive and caring school climate, positive relationships, and improved communication.18 The second tier addresses disruptions and conflicts that do not require intensive intervention, but without response could develop into more serious crises.19 The top tier addresses the most serious conflicts.20

School-wide RJ programs include a set of restorative practices or activities that can be implemented at one or more of the three tiers. Circles are used at all tiers, and feature equal opportunity for all students to speak their mind. Each circle may include a “daily check-in,” a relational practice that helps students and staff become familiar with one another and understand how they are feeling that day. Circle participants often pass around a stone or other symbolic object as they take turns speaking. Many RJ programs also feature peer mediation and peer courts, usually at tiers two and three. An important feature of any restorative practice is follow-up, which ensures that agreements are kept and solutions are implemented.21

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19 Ibid., p. 12.
20 Ibid., p. 13.
21 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
Figure 1.1: Whole-School Restorative Justice Pyramid Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1: School-Wide Prevention Practices</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80-90%</td>
<td>• Repair/reintegrate</td>
<td><strong>Intervention Circles:</strong> Classrooms use circles to resolve conflict and solve problems at the intense intervention level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on accountability</td>
<td><strong>Peer Juries:</strong> Student volunteers act as a mock court with a designated judge, jury, prosecutor, and defense attorneys that assesses minor delinquent acts or school misconduct and works with those directly affected to determine how to repair the harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rebuild relationships</td>
<td><strong>Restorative Conference:</strong> Students and others involved in conflicts meet formally with a trained facilitator to prevent harm, enable people to resolve differences, and build social-emotional capacity through empathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2: Managing Difficulties</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10%</td>
<td>• Prevent harm</td>
<td><strong>Problem-Solving Circles:</strong> Classrooms use circles to resolve conflict and solve problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Resolve differences</td>
<td><strong>Restorative Conversation:</strong> Teachers have informal conversations using restorative language with students involved in a potential conflict to repair or prevent harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Build socio-emotional capacity</td>
<td><strong>Hallway Conferences:</strong> Using quick conversations to understand how people were affected and take steps to prevent harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 3: Intensive Intervention</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5%</td>
<td>• Develop healthy relationships</td>
<td><strong>Restorative Conference:</strong> Students and others involved in conflicts meet formally with a trained facilitator to prevent harm, enable people to resolve differences, and build social-emotional capacity through empathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify common values and guidelines</td>
<td><strong>Peer Mediation:</strong> Using a peer mediator to help resolve conflict before it becomes harmful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop socio-emotional understanding and skills</td>
<td><strong>Relational Practices:</strong> Schools make space to resolve conflicts within the classroom and understand relationships within the school community through activities such as daily check-ins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote and strengthen sense of belonging and ownership</td>
<td><strong>Circles:</strong> Groups come together to facilitate student and teacher connectivity through egalitarian discussions that can be used to celebrate successes, discuss challenges, make decisions, or address misconduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Routines:</strong> Classes create, adhere to, discuss, and review a set classroom values, such as a Classroom Constitution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Alameda County Health Care Services Agency School Health Services Coalition

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22 Table content adapted from: Ibid., pp. 10-16.
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Implementing an RJ program can be a challenging process, as it requires a major shift in how schools understand and respond to harm. Several national-level non-profit organizations and universities have published RJ implementation guides and or include recommendations for RJ implementation as part of evaluations of school-wide RJ programs. In particular, these organizations emphasize the importance of developing a feasible implementation plan, building consensus around the value of restorative justice, training members of the school community to use RJ, and establishing considerations to sustain the program beyond the initial implementation period.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Many schools introduce restorative justice into the existing discipline process gradually. In particular, several districts profiled in this report chose to pilot restorative justice in a small number of schools before scaling-up the program. Other districts implement restorative justice among a particular group of students. For example, Minneapolis Public Schools initially chose to offer restorative justice only to students recommended for expulsion, rather than all exclusionary discipline practices.

Experts recommend that schools and districts develop a multi-year RJ implementation plan, rather than implementing a full program all at once. Several organizations propose a timeline of three years, during which schools move from initial communication about the benefits of restorative justice, through a training and implementation period, and towards achieving embedded behavioral change across the school community. Figure 1.2 presents a three-year timeframe and the indicators of change that districts should achieve at each phase of the implementation plan.

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How a school or district chooses to structure its RJ implementation plan may vary, depending on external timelines, availability of resources, and various student, school, and staff characteristics. However, experts stress that the implementation plan should include sufficient time to build consensus, train facilitators, and pilot restorative justice activities. For example, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency (ACHCSA) outlines a three-year implementation process, outlined in Figure 1.3 on the following page, during which a RJ program begins in a single school and then prepares to scale up district-wide.

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## Figure 1.3: Sample District-Wide Restorative Justice Implementation Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Implementation Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Year 1** | Two staff members attend a 3-day Restorative Justice training.  
Informal conversations with administrators about Restorative Justice begin to take place.  
Informal conversations and support circles for teachers begin.  
Minimal Restorative Justice practices are used with students. |
| **Year 2** | A 2-day training for all staff, administrators, and other adults who are part of the school community is offered prior to the new school year.  
Monthly learning community and relationship building meetings are initiated. These meetings are 2-3 hours, use a Restorative Justice process, and take place all year.  
An all-day Restorative Justice training is held in late Fall and in the Spring.  
Informal conversations with students about Restorative Justice begin.  
Some staff begin to use restorative practices to resolve conflicts with students.  
Administrators begin to use restorative practices for disciplinary infractions  
Restorative Justice practices are used for healing and celebration.  
An elective Restorative Justice class is offered to students. |
| **Year 3** | Two-day training is held prior to the beginning of the school year.  
Monthly learning community and relationship building meetings occur throughout the year.  
An all-day Restorative Justice training is held in the Spring.  
Formal trainings are given for students in Restorative Justice philosophy and practices.  
Students begin to use restorative practices for student conflicts.  
Restorative practices are used regularly for all conflicts and discipline issues |
| **Overall** | Successes and opportunities are shared with the broader community leading to district-wide interest in Restorative Justice.  
An alliance is developed with the county Juvenile Justice System and conversations around implementing Restorative Justice with the district are taking place.  
District managers, especially those focused on the expulsion process, are invited to conversations about Restorative Justice, including meeting leaders in the field.  
Other schools begin requesting trainings for their staff as a whole school experience.  
District leaders are invited to presentations and trainings specific to their needs and questions.  
A professional learning community is formed that provides support and coaching for practitioners. |

Source: Alameda County Health Care Services Agency[^29]

### BUILDING CONSENSUS

In order to build an effective RJ program, the school or district must communicate the need for and value of implementing such a program.[^30] Researchers at the University of California-Berkeley, in their evaluation of RJ implementation in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), write that uneven support for restorative justice, especially among teachers, can negatively impact student, staff, and parent perceptions of the program. In particular, the district should expect that some parents and teachers will be wary of the value of RJ over

[^29]: Chart contents taken with minor alterations from: Ibid., p. 29.
[^30]: Ibid., p. 22.
traditional discipline measures, especially when it comes to ensuring that students pay attention and learn the consequences of their actions.\textsuperscript{31}

Schools can build a case for restorative justice by examining expulsion rates, suspension data, or discipline referrals to determine if they are unnecessarily high. A district may also gather qualitative data that describe the negative impact of the existing discipline system, such as observations that current practices disproportionately affect a particular student group, or dissatisfaction expressed by teaching staff.\textsuperscript{32} For example, in a report about exclusionary discipline practices in 11 Texas districts, the non-profit Texas Appleseed calculated the costs of such practices, including the sunk costs of educating the student while he or she is absent for out-of-school suspension, the costs of sending students to alternative programs such as Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) and Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP).\textsuperscript{33}

In many schools, the consensus-building process is led by a strong school-based advocate of restorative justice.\textsuperscript{34} For example, Leaders of the RJ program in Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), profiled in Section III of this report, note that RJ advocates must “market expansively” the benefits of RJ throughout the school or district.\textsuperscript{35} RJ advocates should conduct outreach to key stakeholders who will be involved in restorative justice, including:\textsuperscript{36}

- School district administrators,
- School board members,
- Principals,
- Teachers and school staff,
- Students,
- Parents and caregivers,
- The local community.

For large school systems that intend to implement an RJ program district-wide, the Fairfax County Public Schools leaders suggest engaging intermediate school professionals, such as

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
multi-school cluster directors.\textsuperscript{37} Regardless of the scope of outreach, the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency School Health Services Coalition (ACHCSA) emphasizes that skeptics of RJ should be involved in the planning process, and that advocates for the program acknowledge where existing discipline practices are working, in addition to focusing on where they are not.\textsuperscript{38}

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Professional development and training are a key component of an RJ implementation plan. The ACHSCA writes that training should be an ongoing process to ensure the sustainability of the program through staff and student turnover.\textsuperscript{39} In addition, frequent training helps ensure the consistent application of restorative justice principles throughout a school or district.\textsuperscript{40}

Many school districts partner with community-based organizations, such as non-profits and universities, to deliver initial and ongoing professional development in restorative justice practices. By partnering with a community-based organization, the school can reduce the burden on its own time and resources.\textsuperscript{41} One such organization, the International Institute for Restorative Practice (IIRP), uses videos, experiential learning activities, and mentoring offered in multiple formats, including:

- On-site professional development,
- Organizing staff into “professional learning groups,” and
- Regular follow-up phone meetings.

While implementing a whole-school restorative justice program, many schools extend training to students and parents as well. For example, in Oakland USD, which is profiled in this report, students have the opportunity to enroll in a restorative justice class, and to undergo additional training to become a circle leader. A small number of OUSD parents participated in one-day and weekend training sessions as well.\textsuperscript{43}

**SUSTAINABILITY**

Restorative justice programs face several challenges to ensuring sustainable growth. One challenge is funding. Many school districts rely on external funding for initial training and personnel. However, a district should expect that that funding may decline once the program is established. At the same time, if the school is able to align current practices and resources to support whole-school restorative justice, additional funds may not be

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\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 32.
necessary.\textsuperscript{44} In fact, research suggests that implementing restorative justice can save a school or district money over time.\textsuperscript{45} The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority suggests that districts may be able to secure additional funding for restorative justice programs through the U.S. Department of Education (Title IV Safe and Drug Free Schools), school discretionary funds, fundraising, and partnerships with local service agencies.\textsuperscript{46}

Experts further argue that careful record keeping will facilitate both continued improvement and form the basis of requests for further resources to sustain and expand an RJ program.\textsuperscript{47} Districts typically collect data on absences, discipline referrals, detentions, suspensions, and expulsions on a regular basis. In addition, a school with an RJ program may also consider collecting qualitative data on aspects of student behavior, such as:\textsuperscript{48}

- Quality of social interactions during restorative justice activities,
- Personal growth of individual students,
- Capacity of students to solve problems, and
- Self-determination

In order to facilitate quality data collection, some RJ programs develop evaluation forms for participants to complete and the end of each activity.\textsuperscript{49}
SECTION II: DISTRICT PROFILES

While it is not clear how many districts in the U.S. are implementing restorative justice, the literature identifies several districts, especially large urban districts, that are developing district-wide programs. This section describes the experience of ten districts that have implemented multi-school or district-wide RJ programs:

- Oakland Unified School District (California)
- Chicago Public Schools (Illinois)
- School District of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)
- Pittsburgh Public Schools (Pennsylvania)
- North East Independent School District (Texas)
- Spring Branch Independent School District (Texas)
- Waco Independent School District (Texas)
- Austin Independent School District (Texas)
- Angleton Independent School District (Texas)
- Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia)

OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has been growing its district-wide restorative justice program since RJ started in a single middle school in 2005. The RJ program in OUSD is one of the highest-profile RJ programs in the country and has been the focus of numerous news reports on restorative justice programs.

FIRST-YEAR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

OUSD’s RJ program began in Cole Middle School. The school’s principal, struggling with increasing discipline problems at the school, petitioned the district for permission to begin an RJ program. Once permission was granted, Oakland partnered with a community-based

52 See for example:
non-profit, Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), to implement the program. An RJOY employee, funded by the City of Oakland, worked at Cole Middle School full-time to lead the RJ implementation.

Initial RJ training focused on ensuring that all Cole Middle School staff became familiar with the principles of the model. During the first year, all teachers and staff attended training in the philosophy and methodology of RJ. The program initially focused on disciplinary circles, and eventually expanded to include daily community-building circles held during the morning advisory period.

Cole Middle School experienced several challenges while implementing RJ. Researchers from the University of California-Berkeley described these challenges in a report on the first year of RJ implementation at the school. Those challenges, and the researchers’ recommended response to them, are described in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1: First-Year Challenges of Cole Middle School’s RJ Implementation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHALLENGE</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers expressed concern that daily community circles took too much time out of the school day.</td>
<td>Many teachers supported RJ practices once they implemented them in their classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneven support for RJ among the school community.</td>
<td>Employ a strong advocate for RJ at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and staff tired of community circles as discussions frequently went off-topic.</td>
<td>Ensure that the circle discussion focuses on a topic of immediate relevance to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community circles ended early because of student misbehavior.</td>
<td>Focus on the principles that inform actual practice of RJ, rather than the rituals inherent to RJ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and staff confused RJ with other behavior programs.</td>
<td>Clarify when activities are fully restorative, partially restorative, or not part of an RJ program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents unable to participate in RJ activities because of work schedules.</td>
<td>Take into account the special circumstances of parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imbalance in power dynamics during and outside of circle time impact student participation in RJ.</td>
<td>Focus on creating a culture of RJ in which students view adults as human beings who respect them, not just authority figures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sumner, Silverman, and Frampton

**EXPANSION**

During the 2013-14 school year, restorative justice programs in OUSD expanded to 24 schools, with either school-wide RJ or a smaller scale Peer RJ program put in place at two

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54 Ibid., p. 10.
55 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., pp. 10-30.
elementary schools, 13 middle schools, and nine high schools. This gradual expansion has been fueled by the success of restorative justice at Cole Middle School, as well as concern from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights about continued high rates of suspension and expulsion, especially among African-American students. In May 2015, the OUSD school board appropriated an additional $2.3 million to expand RJ practices throughout the district and voted to eliminate willful defiance as cause for suspension.

OUSD does not use a specific set of criteria to determine which schools are selected to implement restorative justice. However, selection is typically based on school leader or staff interest and academic and behavior indicators, such as low academic performance, high rates of suspension and expulsion, and student contact with the juvenile justice system.

As the district-wide RJ program has grown, OUSD has expanded the district-level team that oversees and assists schools with RJ implementation. Between 2011 and 2014, the district hired a Program Manager, two RJ specialists, and several consultant RJ coordinators that facilitate implementation at the school level. OUSD will soon increase its staff to include a Program Coordinator, four Program Managers, and 26 RJ facilitators. Each Program Manager will supervise eight to 12 RJ facilitators, each of whom are assigned to a school site.

MODEL

The RJ program in OUSD features a three-tier structure similar to PBIS. The majority of the restorative practices are Tier 1 community-building, with only 15 to 20 percent of OUSD students engaging in Tier 2 restorative discipline. The use of specific practices varies from school to school, and RJ facilitators adjust the practices to meet the needs of participants (e.g., age-appropriate language and discussion topics). In a 2014 survey, RJ coordinators reported that they conduct the following restorative practices, with the most frequently implemented practices listed first:

- Restorative conversations with students;
- Impromptu conferences with students;
- Harm/conflict circles;

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
One-on-one coaching;
- Classroom circles; and
- Community conferences and family group conferences.

**Student Privacy**

RJ circles and conferences in OUSD are treated as private, although the information shared is not legally confidential. RJ facilitators ask that participants respect the privacy of other participants, and not say anything outside the circle that others in the circle would not want to be shared. RJ facilitators report circle outcomes to the principal, but do not share details of what was said unless the principal needs to know specific information for a child welfare reason.

Source: Oakland USD

An important element of the RJ program in OUSD is youth engagement. Most students are in the school system for more time than teachers or staff, and therefore it is critical for youth to “own” the program in order for it to be successful. OUSD’s Restorative Justice Youth Leadership Council works to achieve this goal. The Council is a group of middle and high school students “committed to increasing meaningful student engagement and student leadership within restorative practices.” The Council collaborates with OUSD and RJOY to drive student involvement in RJ across the district.

**TRAINING**

OUSD works to ensure program integrity through trainings and ongoing coaching. RJ training aims to create an environment that reduces conflict, and to empower individuals to resolve their own conflicts when they arise. The district’s primary goal in training is to develop school-level sustainability so that schools are not reliant on district-level RJ staff for restorative practices.

The district’s RJ Program Coordinator and four Program Managers conduct trainings for parents and staff; in fact, OUSD had trained “hundreds, if not thousands” of individuals in restorative practices over the last 10 years. In 2014, all principals at RJ schools received training, compared to 63.6 percent of teachers and 9.8 percent of parents. OUSD offers RJ trainings throughout the year that focus on specific Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 practices. These

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68 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
74 Ibid., p. 24.
Trainings are sequential, and participants must complete the training for each tier in order to conduct practices in that tier. At schools that have implemented RJ, training for staff frequently includes:

- Three days of training;
- On-site coaching; and
- A monthly professional learning community.

In addition, district- and school-level RJ staff developed binders for teachers that include forms and model frameworks for how and when activities should be conducted. Following the initial training, the Program Managers provide one-on-one coaching for RJ facilitators. These on-site sessions address challenges at the facilitator’s particular school, ranging from modeling practices for teachers to training youth to lead peer circles. The RJ Program Coordinator at OUSD describes the training and coaching model as one of the most successful elements of OUSD’s RJ program, as it provides necessary support to RJ facilitators as they begin using restorative practices.

Evaluation

OUSD conducts participant surveys to gauge the perceived impact of the RJ program, in addition to analysis of student discipline data. A 2014 program evaluation found a considerable reduction in suspensions among RJ schools in the district compared to non-RJ schools. Furthermore, the evaluation found that the impact of RJ participation is greater for African-American students than their counterparts. Indeed, 53 percent of teachers reported that RJ helped reduce disciplinary referrals for African-American students, and 47 percent of teachers reported that RJ helped reduce office referrals. Overall, RJ schools experienced a 56 percent decline in high school dropout rates between 2010 and 2013. It should be noted that RJ is not occurring in isolation; other initiatives such as PBIS and culturally relevant practices also contribute to these outcomes.

The RJ Program Coordinator at OUSD identifies parent, student, and administrator engagement as the district’s greatest area for improvement. Although OUSD has experienced significant gains in closing the discipline gap between African American students and white students, RJ still serves a disproportionate number of African American students.

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77 Ibid., p. 24.
80 Ibid., p. vi.
82 Ibid.
The RJ Program Coordinator at OUSD suggests that districts considering RJ implementation start with pilot programs at the schools that are most interested in the process, then expand after developing a district-specific RJ model. He advises that districts focus on Tier 1 practices before Tier 2, as the majority of students will engage in Tier 1 practices. He also suggests that districts employ a district-level staff person whose sole responsibility is managing the RJ program. Finally, the Program Coordinator notes that it helpful to have RJ coordinators or facilitators at school sites to train school-level staff and help with implementation.83

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the nation’s third largest school district.84 The implementation of restorative justice throughout the district has been a gradual, and sometimes contested, process. In particular, CPS has made two efforts to implement restorative justice, first as a pilot program in 2008, and then district-wide in 2014.85

PILOT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

In 2008, CPS awarded grants worth $300,000 to six schools to start pilot RJ programs. For example, one school, Monroe Elementary, used the funds to facilitate peace circles and peer juries. However, when the grant term ended in 2010, most schools had not used all of the disbursed funds.86

Local advocates believe one reason why the pilot programs did not succeed as expected was because the district did not consider whether the staff, students, and parents at the schools that received the grant were interested in RJ. While the precise selection criteria that CPS used is not available, a non-profit that conducted RJ training at two schools indicated that one of them was not interested in implementing the program.87

In addition, school leaders report that they did not have sufficient resources to implement the program. Program implementation was the responsibility of the principal, who already had a busy schedule. At one school, several months passed before the non-profit hired to facilitate peer juries conducted its first training.88

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83 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
**DISTRICT-WIDE IMPLEMENTATION**

In the 2014-15 school year, CPS implemented a revised *Student Code of Conduct*, which aimed to replace a zero-tolerance, exclusionary approach to discipline with “instructive, corrective, and restorative approach” to behavior. The policy manual lists six categories of behavior, ranging from “inappropriate behaviors” to “illegal and most seriously disruptive behaviors,” and recommends restorative practices as a response to each.

To implement restorative justice district-wide, CPS partnered with community organizations, such as IIRP and Alternatives, Inc., a community-based organization that has facilitated restorative practices in one CPS high school since 1996. Some schools use professional learning communities, organized at the grade level, to learn, share, and spread restorative practices in the school.

In addition, CPS has 100 “restorative practice coaches” that visit schools, sometimes weekly. District-wide, there are 72 climate support teams and 14 social and emotional learning (SEL) support specialists. CPS used behavioral data to decide which schools should receive these resources. However, some teachers indicate that those resources and trainings are not enough. In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, a representative of the Chicago Teachers Union indicated that in order for RJ to work in the district, schools need restorative justice coordinators or behavior interventionists in the school, “peace rooms” for students to decompress, training for school employees, and streamlined school discipline measures.

**OUTCOMES**

CPS credits the focus on restorative justice with a dramatic decrease in suspensions and expulsions in the one year since the revised *Student Code of Conduct* was implemented. During the first semester of 2014-15, 124 students in CPS schools were expelled, compared to 200 the previous year. Further, suspensions decreased by 60 percent during this period, down to 9,907 from 25,218 a year before.

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90 Ibid., pp. 12-20.
94 Ibid.
95 “CPS Announces Mid-Year Data: 60 Percent Fewer Out of School Suspensions So Far This Year, 69 Percent Reduction in Expulsions,” Op. cit.
SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

The School District of Philadelphia is currently implementing a restorative justice pilot program in 10 schools across the district.96

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

In 2013, the School District of Philadelphia received a grant of over $730,000 to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative justice programs in “schools in which the threat of violence prevents learning and achievement.”97 The district’s goals for implementing PBIS and restorative justice include:98

- Reducing violent incidents;
- Ensuring school climates conducive to learning;
- Reducing suspensions; and
- Ensuring a school-wide culture of acceptance and respect.

The School District of Philadelphia partnered with the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) to implement its SaferSanerSchools Whole-School Change initiative. IIRP provides training and implementation guidance for the participating schools.99 Some of the benefits of the partnership include thorough training sessions, classroom observations, and teacher feedback. Furthermore, the experience of IIRP staff with urban environments makes the practices more relevant for district staff and students. However, the IIRP model is most appropriate for high school students and the restorative questions should be adapted for elementary school students.100

TRAINING

IIRP’s model calls for four days of staff training on restorative justice. However, district leaders admit that they did not provide sufficient time for staff to participate in the full training, creating a barrier to implementation that demonstrates the importance of stakeholder buy-in.101

The RJ training in the School District of Philadelphia emphasizes that many students “experience poverty, hunger, an unstable family life, and street violence” that influences

96 Deputy Chief for School Climate and Safety, School District of Philadelphia. Telephone Interview.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Deputy Chief for School Climate and Safety, Opt. cit.
101 Ibid.
their behavior. Therefore, the training encourages teachers to take a “trauma-informed” approach to discipline that recognizes student backgrounds.

One of the district’s challenges in implementing restorative justice was the logistical problem of scheduling training for more than 20,000 employees. High staff turnover in the district is a substantial challenge for program sustainability, and district layoffs during the implementation period have reduced the number of staff available to support restorative practices in schools, creating further capacity challenges.

**OUTCOMES**

The school district’s Office of Student Support Services is responsible for monitoring the PBIS and RJ initiatives. Thus far, the district has changed several policies to reduce punitive practices. The adoption of restorative questions in classrooms is one of the program’s greatest successes. Furthermore, the restorative practices training provides opportunities for teachers and staff in large schools to gather and share a common experience, which creates a more positive and unified school climate.

The district is in the process of developing a formal evaluation method for the restorative justice program. This evaluation will include data on student detentions, suspensions, and attendance, among other indicators. The RJ program does serve a disproportionate number of students from certain subgroups, with the caveat that many of the schools in the pilot program comprise mostly minority students.

**Student Privacy**

The district avoids data confidentiality issues by reporting data at the school level rather than the student level.

Source: School District of Philadelphia

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103 Ibid.
105 Deputy Chief for School Climate and Safety, Opt. cit.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) is currently implementing a two-year restorative justice pilot program in 23 selected schools.111

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

In October 2014, PPS received a $3 million grant to develop restorative practices programs. The district partnered with the RAND Corporation to conduct a randomized control trial to evaluate the success of the program, and matched each school in the district with a similar school. The district then randomly selected half of the 46 eligible schools to implement restorative practices starting in the 2015-16 school year. The district’s goal for the program is to prevent disruptions that lead to suspensions by recognizing that “punishment is not always the best way to alter behavior.”112

Student Privacy

| RJ facilitators in PPS ask all participants to verbally agree to participate in restorative conversations. The facilitators then tell participants that all information that is shared is private to the participants in that conversation and should not be shared with others. |

Source: Pittsburgh Public Schools113

TRAINING

PPS partnered with the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) to implement its SaferSanerSchools Whole-School Change initiative. IIRP provided a day of restorative practices training to all employees in each of the selected schools.114 IIRP also paired each participating school with a coach.115 Currently, the participating schools do not employ full-time staff members dedicated to restorative practices, and therefore the staff are reliant on materials from training sessions with IIRP.116

EVALUATION

The RAND Corporation will provide an objective evaluation of the RJ program across PPS using multiple measures, such as suspension rates, test scores, and student and teacher

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113 Principal, Pittsburgh Public Schools. Telephone Interview.
116 Ibid.
surveys on school climate to assess program effectiveness. RAND will also be conducting in-depth case studies at four of the participating schools.\textsuperscript{117}

The community-building circles have been the most effective practice thus far, and the restorative circles have experienced mixed results. The one participating high school is implementing restorative practices across the whole school, and does not use different strategies for different groups of students.\textsuperscript{118}

**NORTH EAST ISD**

Edward White Middle School (EWMS), part of North East ISD in San Antonio, was the first school in Texas to implement restorative justice.\textsuperscript{119} The success of the program at EWMS inspired several other schools to adopt similar programs throughout the San Antonio area.\textsuperscript{120}

**PLANNING**

EWMS principal Philip Carney led the effort to bring restorative justice to the school, with support from the district and assistance from RJ experts at UT-Austin. In 2012, EWMS had one of the highest discipline rates in the district. Carney first consulted Robert Pico, a professor at the University of Texas–San Antonio who taught a course on restorative justice. Carney then spoke with stakeholders at his school and the district office about the possibility of implementing restorative justice at EWMS. Once those individuals agreed on the need for the program, Carney then worked with Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue (IRJRD) at UT-Austin to develop a proposal for how to implement RJ principles schoolwide.\textsuperscript{121} The proposal recommendations included:\textsuperscript{122}

- Support a strategic rollout, implementing the program one grade at a time, beginning with Grade 6 for the 2012-13 school year, with plans to add Grade 7 and then Grade 8 in the two successive years;
- Hold a two-day training for the teachers at the beginning of the school year;
- Hire a consultant to help implement the program;
- Form an on-site leadership response team at the grade level that can be responsible for day-to-day implementation; and
- Have the IRJRD evaluate the outcomes and the implementation process on a monthly basis so that the knowledge will be transferable to other schools.

\textsuperscript{118} Principal, Pittsburgh Public Schools. Op. cit.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., pp. 16-17.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 17.
While the school’s top leadership initiated restorative justice at EWMS, Carney emphasizes that it was a voluntary process and requires large-scale buy-in. “Schools will always do better if they come to this voluntarily,” Carney explains. “Restorative justice is built on the idea that people participate voluntarily.”

Restorative justice at EWMS is voluntary, and students can choose to go through either the traditional or restorative discipline process. Restorative activities at EWMS include restorative circles and conferences, which are used proactively to build community and to address specific conflicts and offenses.

### Student Privacy

Students and their parents consent to the restorative discipline process, and provide permission to participate in conferences. Restorative conference participants share the information they choose with the other participants, and the facilitators do not share information on their behalf. This prevents privacy and FERPA issues.

Source: North East ISD

**TRAINING**

In August 2012, 40 EWMS teachers and district personnel participated in an initial two-day RJ training. Dr. Nancy Riestenberg, a prevention specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education, led the training. Even though only Grade 6 teachers would participate in the program during its first year, the school deliberately invited teachers from other grades to engage them in what would soon be a school-wide process.

At first, some EWMS teachers were skeptical about restorative justice. In particular, teachers were concerned about the time required to run circles and other restorative practices. However, once restorative justice was in place and began to expand throughout the school, more teachers understood its value and actively supported the program.

Today, RJ training at EWMS begins with a two- or three-day orientation session, followed by ongoing training throughout the year led by an external consultant. Teachers using restorative justice for the first time have the opportunity to co-facilitate RJ activities until they build the confidence and knowledge to facilitate the activities themselves. EWMS teachers may also attend “booster” trainings to refresh and enhance their skills.

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123 Ibid.
128 Ibid., p. 18.
129 Carney, Op. cit..
IRJRD collaborated with EWMS to prepare professional development materials for teachers who implement RJ practices in their classroom. Carney emphasizes that restorative justice is not a “one size fits all” approach, and RJ materials should be tailored to the specific context of the school.¹³⁰

IMPLEMENTATION

EWMS implemented restorative justice over a three-year period, starting with Grade 6 during the 2012-13 school year and adding one grade in each of the subsequent years.¹³¹ During this time, a consultant from IRJRD was available to assist teachers and facilitate RJ activities.¹³² In total, the RJ program at EWMS cost approximately $16,000 to implement during the first year, including:

- $3,000 for the two-day staff training;
- $8,000 for the part-time consultant at the school; and
- $5,000 for materials and research costs.

Implementation during the first year was uneven. During an evaluation of first-year progress, researchers at the IRJRD observed that many teachers were uncertain about how to implement restorative justice, especially for community-building purposes. IRJRD recommended increased teacher training and the creation of a teacher handbook to help guide implementation of RJ at the school.¹³⁴ Figure 2.2 on the following page presents the results and recommendations from IRJRD’s first-year evaluation.

¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³² Ibid., p. 55.
Figure 2.2: IRJRD First-Year Evaluation of Restorative Justice at EWMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVATIONS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Spotty use of RJ by teachers, particularly for community building and classroom management.</td>
<td>▪ Greater attention to the practical application of RJ during teacher training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Lack of clear procedures about when and how to use RJ.</td>
<td>▪ Opportunities for ongoing teacher education and discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Delays in executing RJ agreements and monitoring plans for conflict and disciplinary issues.</td>
<td>▪ Creation of a handbook for teachers to help with application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Enthusiastic responses from students, with student-generated requests for circles and active engagement in restorative processes.</td>
<td>▪ Greater feedback to teachers about the current use of restorative justice in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Greater regard among teachers of the importance and benefits of building relationships with students.</td>
<td>▪ Development of peer-facilitated circles to instill student responsibility and build leaderships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Involvement of parents/caregivers in restorative processes and on an advisory council.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IRJRD

During the second year of implementation, teachers developed respect agreements with students that outlined the values that would guide the conduct of the class during the year. In addition, circles became more frequent. Students participated in circles three times per week, in different classes each time, as depicted in Figure 2.3. This thrice-weekly circle practice was established as a norm throughout the school.

Figure 2.3: Circle Schedule at EWMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check-in Circle (Monday)</th>
<th>Check-up Circle (Wednesday)</th>
<th>Check-out Circle (Friday)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 1st Period (Grade 6)</td>
<td>• 4th Period (Grade 6)</td>
<td>• 8th Period (Grades 6 and 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2nd Period (Grade 7)</td>
<td>• 5th Period (Grade 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IRJRD

IRJRD continued to monitor the implementation of RJ throughout the program’s second year. The second-year evaluation found that teachers varied considerably in their perspective of and implementation of restorative justice. Teachers who were implementing restorative justice for the first time (i.e., Grade 7 teachers) were more hesitant to implement the practices, while Grade 6 teachers, who were by then in their second year of implementing restorative justice, were more comfortable and using RJ practices in more diverse ways (e.g., restorative chats with students in the hallway).

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135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., p. 22.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid., p. 53.
OUTCOMES

Carney’s primary goal in implementing restorative justice at EWMS was to change the school’s culture. In his view, effective restorative justice implementation encourages students to interact more respectfully with their peers and teachers, and teachers to interact more respectfully with their students.139

In 2014, IRJRD reported that after two years of implementation, in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions decreased among students who participated in restorative justice, as did the number of students who were late to school. In addition, the EWMS students achieved significant gains on STAAR reading and math exams. In fact, EWMS ranked second in the state for improvement in student achievement, when compared to schools with similar student demographics. That year, the Texas Education Agency awarded EWMS with a special commendation on its Accountability Rating and a star of distinction, in recognition for gains in student achievement.140

Although EWMS still experiences a disproportionate referral rate for African American students, the school has reduced the gap between African American students and white students by 30 percent through restorative discipline.141 Carney notes that while schools may see more of an impact on African American, Hispanic, male, and low-income students, the practices of restorative justice are beneficial for all students. To this end, there are not specific practices that work best for certain sub-groups of students. However, Carney advises that RJ facilitators customize the content and language of restorative practices to meet the needs of those particular students.142

EXPANSION

The success of EWMS’s RJ program inspired other schools in San Antonio to implement similar programs. In fact, teachers and school principals have driven the interest and implementation of restorative justice in these schools, rather than district administrators. The Region 20 Education Service Center, which serves San Antonio area schools, offered popular training sessions for interested teachers and administrators in response. By the end of 2014, 12 districts in the San Antonio area had implemented restorative justice at one or more schools, usually at the middle school level.143

For the 2015-16 school year, Carney is working with colleagues to expand restorative justice to other schools in North East ISD. His new role as Restorative Discipline Coordinator is to bring restorative justice programs to elementary, middle, and high schools across the district. The first step in this process is developing an implementation plan that allows each

142 Ibid.
school to customize the restorative justice program to that school’s needs. **Carney finds that it is best to have a trained and certified restorative justice coordinator on-site for four to five years to guide the implementation of restorative justice.** Carney suggests that larger schools aim to hire full-time coordinators, while small schools only need someone part-time. If this is not possible, Carney suggests that the school train a small cadre of individuals to build a restorative justice team. These staff provide ongoing professional development support and counseling. Carney also encourages districts to invest in support services (e.g., training, consulting, coaching) to ensure program sustainability.  

Regarding district-wide implementation, Carney suggests that districts start RJ in the schools that are most enthusiastic about restorative justice. In his words, “you [cannot] force people to be restorative,” so it is imperative that the school principal and staff are supportive of the initiative. Carney notes some differences when restorative justice is implemented across different grade levels. For example, he says it is easier for elementary schools to conduct regular circles since students are contained in a single classroom environment.

**SPRING BRANCH ISD**

The restorative justice program at Academy of Choice (AOC), a small alternative school in Spring Branch ISD (SBISD), has become a model for RJ programs throughout the Houston area. The AOC model centers on student-led activities, called “student apprenticeships.”

**PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Like many schools, restorative justice at AOC was spearheaded by a single teacher and then scaled up throughout the school. Anita Wadhwa, the school’s in-school suspension teacher, had studied restorative justice in graduate school and was eager to bring the concept to AOC, a small alternative school that serves many students with behavioral challenges, including many students with criminal records. The principal at AOC also knew about restorative justice practices and encouraged Wadhwa to start an RJ program.

In 2012-13, Wadhwa began to implement RJ school-wide at AOC. During that first year, she taught a leadership class, during which 10 students were “apprenticed” to conduct circles themselves. In the years since, the program has expanded throughout the school.

As the RJ program expanded at AOC, more teachers were trained to serve not just as facilitators, but school-wide coordinators. In the summer of 2015, two teachers were trained to serve as coordinators alongside Wadhwa. As a result, at least one coordinator is

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145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Wadhwa, A. Restorative Justice Coordinator, Academy of Choice. Telephone Interview.
148 Ibid.
available during all class periods to respond to conflicts in real time and conduct a circle as an immediate response. These experiences allow teachers to observe the more experienced RJ facilitator, and therefore learn how to respond to similar circumstances in the future. Wadhwa emphasizes the importance of administrator buy-in and the dedication of a small number of teachers to start RJ at the school and inspire others will follow.

**Model**

AOC established restorative justice as an automatic option for every discipline referral at the school, and a discipline team reviews each discipline referral and evaluates the possibility of using restorative practices as a response. At AOC, restorative practices are typically circles designed for a wide variety of purposes, including:

- **Community building circles** to build relationships;
- **Talking circles** to see how students are doing; and
- **Healing circles** to address conflict.

To guide the circles, Wadhwa uses a script from the book *Taking Restorative Justice to Schools: A Doorway to Discipline* by Jeanette Holtham. Students report that through restorative justice, they feel that they have more voice in the process and leave the session with less anger than they would in a traditional justice system. Additionally, Wadhwa is expanding RJ to students who are returning from the district’s discipline school or the juvenile justice system. She conducts “re-entry circles” with these students, employing both a preventative and reactive mindset to these cases.

AOC follows what Wadhwa calls the “youth apprenticeship model” of implementing restorative justice. In her leadership class, students read about the school-to-prison pipeline and the racial dimension of youth crime and imprisonment. Students in the class participate in circles every day, and eventually learn to lead circles themselves and then lead circles at other schools. AOC emphasizes student ownership of the restorative justice process. Wadhwa frequently asks her students “If the adults left today, how would you run the program?” She credits the success of the program to student buy-in, and students and staff at AOC report that students are more responsive to student-led circles than staff-led circles.

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151 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
**Student Privacy**

RJ facilitators at AOC tell participants that the topics discussed in a circle are confidential unless someone speaks about hurting themselves or hurting others, in which case the facilitator must report the information. The school has not had any problems with students sharing information outside of circles.

Source: Spring Branch ISD

**EVALUATION**

AOC administers surveys to students after they participate in restorative practices. Wadhwa reports that “every single survey has been positive.” Wadhwa considers the circles of support to be the most successful element of RJ at AOC, as students open up during the circles, which helps them build peer relationships. The majority of students at AOC are students of color, and many of the discussions in circles are about issues of power and race. Wadhwa encourages schools to invite speakers on these topics, recognizing that students may have traumatic experiences that inform their behavior and views.

**DISTRICT-WIDE EXPANSION**

SBISD does not currently have a district-wide RJ implementation plan. However, all SBISD assistant principals had the opportunity to participate in one of Wadhwa’s trainings during the 2014-15 school year. Wadhwa hopes that interested school leaders will go on to recruit a team to lead implementation at their own campus. In addition, Wadhwa and the Restorative Justice Collaborative of Houston, a volunteer organization that she leads, hold annual conferences in the Houston area that draw more than 100 individuals. However, Wadhwa acknowledges that it is more difficult to implement RJ at a district-wide level than at a small school like AOC.

**WACO ISD**

Waco ISD (WISD) is current piloting restorative justice in two schools during the 2015-16 academic year. The new RJ initiative in the district builds upon a 2012 effort to reduce tickets and discipline referrals to the district’s DAEP school through a program called Suspending Kids to School.

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161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The district’s RJ pilot program is underway at Waco High School and Carver Middle School. WISD officials indicate that the programs are designed to address high rates of in-school suspensions and parent concerns about misbehavior at school.\(^\text{166}\)

Like many RJ programs, the pilot program in Waco ISD will feature a wide range of restorative practices (which Waco ISD calls “restorative discipline”). According a district document, those practices include:\(^\text{167}\)

- Restorative Conferences
- Restorative Conversations (Chats)
- Community Circles
- Entry/Re-Entry Circles
- Peacemaking Circles (Conflict Resolution)
- Support and Accountability Circles (for admins, staff, family, students, campus supports)

In addition, the schools will have a campus facilitator, who will focus on staff behavior as well as student behavior.\(^\text{168}\) The facilitator will be responsible for managing the program and conducting family and community outreach.\(^\text{169}\) Further details of the facilitator’s role are described in Figure 2.4 on the following page.

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### Figure 2.4: Duties and Responsibilities of the Restorative Discipline Facilitator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL DUTIES</th>
<th>COMMUNITY DUTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provide training, modeling, consultation, coaching, and technical support to staff and students in facilitation of school-wide restorative practices.</td>
<td>- Offer training and support to parents and community groups in facilitation of restorative practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Management</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family Outreach</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Respond to incoming discipline referrals to assess appropriate response.</td>
<td>- Offer home visits to facilitate Family Group Conferences (Family Circles) and to support the family outside of the school (resources, immediate needs, rides, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conduct intake assessments for Restorative Conferences and Circles. Prepare participants, contact parents/guardians to invite or inform, send confirmation notices, facilitate process, develop agreed-upon plan, and conduct follow-up.</td>
<td>- Maintain relationships with students and their family in the case of a removal to support the student during their absence to provide a healthier re-entry process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Follow up on all restorative meetings to ensure agreements are upheld.</td>
<td>- Attend legal hearings with students and their family who are actively involved with Restorative Practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Facilitate transitions to and from disciplinary alternative education placements.</td>
<td><strong>Community Outreach</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work with school PBIS, Equity, Leadership, RTI, Data (etc.) teams to collaborate and strengthen current practices.</td>
<td>- Maintain a healthy working relationship with local police and probation officers to strengthen community and school relationships and supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitoring and Data Collection</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coordinate restorative community service opportunities.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintain a daily activity log for the purpose of preparing a report at the end of the week and a summary report at the end of each grading period.</td>
<td>- Facilitate community circles to build healthier relationships with neighbors, family, students and local organizations/resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintain an active file on each student receiving restorative discipline services to facilitate delivery of appropriate interventions and social services.</td>
<td>- Engage in community events, meetings, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Reporting</strong></td>
<td><strong>District Reporting</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Source:** Waco ISD

### SUSPENDING KIDS TO SCHOOL

Suspending Kids to School is not described as an RJ program, but it is an example school-wide program that shares many of the goals and practices associated with RJ. Suspending Kids to School began in 2012, when WISD received a $600,000 grant from the Texas Governor to reduce the district’s high rate of tickets and discipline referrals to the district’s DAEP program.171

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170 Figure text adapted from: Ibid.
Like restorative justice, Suspending Kids to School aims to improve school climate and empower students to solve conflicts on their own. It features a similar three-tiered model of school-wide prevention programs, targeted interventions for students that do not respond to school-wide prevention initiatives, and intensive interventions for students who need additional support. Details of the Suspending Kids to School program are described below and in Figure 2.5. It appears that the Suspend Kids to School Initiative has been implemented only in Waco ISD middle and high school.

**Figure 2.5: Suspending Kids to School Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIER</th>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Safe School Ambassadors</td>
<td>Socially influential students receive training to resolve conflicts, defuse tension, and prevent bullying and violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Peer Mediation</td>
<td>Teams of students receive training to facilitate dispute resolution between two students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triage</td>
<td>Saturday Diversion Course</td>
<td>12-hour course for students and parents to learn alternatives to current behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Court</td>
<td>Juries of 10-15 students review cases and recommend sanctions for student offenders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Waco ISD

School-wide prevention is led by “safe school ambassadors.” Using student and staff surveys, the school identifies socially influential leaders of school cliques. In particular, school leaders look for students who demonstrate good communication skills and a history of standing up for their friends. These student ambassadors attend a two-day training, during which they learn how to resolve conflicts, defuse incidents, and support students who are isolated or excluded from the student community. Throughout the school year, student ambassadors attend Family Group Meetings with program mentors to receive additional training and discuss their interventions.

Intervention is also a student-led process. At each school, a team of students receive training to resolve disputes between two students. Participation in the peer mediation program is voluntary and students are always partnered with mediators of their same age group. At each school, a certified teacher serves as the Peer Mediation Team Coordinator.

Triage features two programs that allow a student the opportunity to “divert” from placement in the district DAEP school or juvenile court. The Saturday Diversion Course is a

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177 “Peer Mediation Program.” Waco ISD. http://www.wacoisd.org/cms/one.aspx?portalId=428&pagId=47870
12-hour program, given in two Saturday sessions, which both students and a parent must attend. During the course:  

- Students learn pro-social alternatives to their current behaviors and understand the long-term consequences of continued school disruptions and/or truancies, and
- Parents learn strategies for supporting their children and learn to meet their developmental needs in healthy and pro-social ways, based on trust and mutual respect.

School administrators, school resource officers (SROs), and judges have the authority to place students in the Saturday Diversion Course.

Through a second program, Student Court, students are brought before a jury of 10 to 15 peers and receive peer-mandated sanctions for their behavior. Student court gives students experience with the judicial system while keeping their record clear.

The Texas A&M University Public Policy Research Institute, which has been monitoring the effectiveness of the Suspend Kids to School Program, reports that during the first two years of the program, suspensions in WISD decreased by more than 25 percent and ticketing by SROs decreased by 77 percent.

**AUSTIN ISD**

Austin ISD (AISD) is in the early stages of RJ implementation, with a pilot program operating at three schools. The district relies on a community-based organization to implement the program and does not have funding at this time to expand restorative justice to other schools. However, district offers several other programs that support positive student behavior and discipline.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Restorative justice was first discussed in AISD when members of the school community, along with a community-based organization called Life Anew, approached the school leadership at Martin Middle School about the possibility of implementing RJ practices in the school. In particular, the community was concerned about discipline practices school. Life Anew partnered with staff at Martin Middle School to implement the program, starting with Grade 6 and then scaling up. Today, Life Anew also manages RJ programs in two district high schools in partnership with the district.

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179 Ibid.
180 “Student Court Program.” Waco ISD. http://www.wacoisd.org/cms/one.aspx?portalId=428&pageId=47874
182 Director of Cultural Proficiency & Inclusiveness, Austin ISD. Telephone Interview.
183 Ibid.
A key feature of the RJ programs in AISD is the presence of a full-time facilitator at each participating school. The facilitator works with the school throughout the first three years of RJ implementation, after which time the schools are expected to manage the RJ program themselves. Life Anew emphasizes that the facilitator must be a member of the greater school community. At LBJ Early College High School, the facilitator is a graduate of AISD who has deep personal knowledge of the community. Life Anew pays the facilitators’ salaries, which amounts to approximately $60,000 for three years.\textsuperscript{184}

The RJ program at Aikins High School has been particularly successful because the program launched at the beginning of the school year. Students participated in circles on the first day of school, in every period. Students and staff reported that this strategy led to the most successful start of school in recent memory.\textsuperscript{185}

\textbf{TRAINING}

Life Anew tailors initial trainings to reflect the key concerns of each stakeholder group. For example, training sessions with administrators focus on the impact restorative justice has on attendance, truancy, standardized test scores, and other indicators of interest to school leaders. Initial training sessions for teachers focus on classroom behavior. Once teachers and staff understand the basic principles of restorative justice, Life Anew trains them on specific RJ practices, starting with Tier 1 activities, such as community building circles. Eventually, Life Anew hopes to train all staff in the school, including custodians.\textsuperscript{186}

\textbf{POSSIBILITIES FOR EXPANSION}

Members of the AISD strategic planning team have identified “professional development on restorative justice/discipline strategies” as part its plan to promote cultural understanding.\textsuperscript{187} However, at this time, expansion is limited by the district’s budget situation.

However, district leaders note that AISD has other programs in place that also support positive student behavior and discipline practices, including:

- \textbf{Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)} is a process that teaches students how to manage emotions, develop care for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and manage challenging situations. During the 2015-16 academic year, SEL is available in all AISD schools.\textsuperscript{188} As part of its SEL programs, AISD uses the Second Step curriculum.\textsuperscript{189}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{188} “Social and Emotional Learning First.” Austin ISD. https://www.austinisd.org/academics/sel
\item \textsuperscript{189} [1] Director of Cultural Proficiency & Inclusiveness, Austin ISD. Op. cit.
\end{thebibliography}
- **Youth Court** at AISD’s Webb Middle School allows students to resolve problems among a jury of their peers. The youth courts, with help from University of Texas Law School students who serve as mentors, can place sanctions on fellow students, ranging from written apologies and essays to counseling and tutoring.

- **Council on At-Risk Youth (CARY) PeaceRox Youth Violence Prevention Program** provides “aggression replacement training” to youth who have been removed from the classroom for misbehavior. CARY currently works with students at 10 AISD schools.

AISD’s Director of Cultural Proficiency and Inclusiveness reports that these programs are beneficial, but they do not address the biases associated with conflict in the way that restorative justice can. The Life Anew Program Director further argues that he does not think of restorative justice as a program, explaining that, “A program is typically something you do in the school, but it is not a whole-school approach... We are talking about this becoming a lifestyle by changing the climate of the school.”

**ANGLETON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Angleton Independent School District (Angleton ISD) is a small public school district outside of Houston. The district started a district-wide restorative justice program during the 2015-16 school year.

**PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Each year, district leaders review student disciplinary data to identify trends and areas for improvement. District leaders noticed that Angleton ISD had not experienced much improvement in recent years in student discipline, and there was a large disproportionality in the number of special education, low-socioeconomic status, and African-American students receiving disciplinary action. After reviewing these data, district leaders began to investigate restorative justice as an alternative approach to discipline.

District leaders partnered with Kevin Curtis, a restorative justice consultant. Curtis has experience leading restorative justice efforts at EWMS in North East ISD, as profiled earlier in this report. Curtis currently works with districts across Texas to implement restorative justice programs, and provides training to teachers, staff, and district leaders. Angleton ISD leaders worked with Curtis to develop a district-wide implementation plan, which

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190 “About the UT Law Youth Court.” UT Law School. http://youthcourt.law.utexas.edu/about.html
195 Program Director, Life Anew. Telephone Interview.
196 Assistant Superintendent, Angleton ISD. Telephone Interview.
197 Ibid.
detailed the phased implementation and training schedule. Angleton ISD is implementing RJ in phases, starting with one grade at each school level (i.e., elementary, middle, high) and expanding each year. Figure 2.6 displays the district’s RJ implementation timeline.

**Figure 2.6: Angleton ISD Restorative Practices Implementation Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YEAR 1</th>
<th>YEAR 2</th>
<th>YEAR 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>Grades 4 and 5</td>
<td>Grades 3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Grades 6 and 7</td>
<td>Grades 6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Grades 9 and 10</td>
<td>Grades 9-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Angleton ISD

The Assistant Superintendent at Angleton ISD recommends a phased RJ implementation for multiple reasons. Primarily, the phased implementation allows the district to build adequate support systems over time to accommodate all teachers. Secondly, it provides the opportunity to build buy-in among participants, whose success can influence those who may have initially expressed hesitation about RJ. Lastly, district administrators recognize that RJ represents a paradigm shift in school culture, and the phased implementation allows students and school staff to adjust to the new approach gradually.

**MODEL**

According to Angleton ISD’s Student Code of Conduct,

Discipline shall be designed to improve conduct and to encourage students to adhere to their responsibilities as members of the school community. Disciplinary action shall draw on the professional judgment of teachers and administrators and on a range of discipline management techniques, including restorative discipline practices. Discipline shall be correlated to the seriousness of the offense, the student’s age and grade level, the frequency of misbehavior, the student’s attitude, the effect of the misconduct on the school environment, and statutory requirements.

The restorative practices discipline model at Angleton ISD includes restorative classroom circles, discipline circles, and expectation-setting at the classroom, school, and district levels. The purpose of these practices is to increase the respect students have for teachers and for each other, as well as the respect that teachers have for students. Although only three grades were selected for the first phase of RJ implementation, many more teachers have incorporated restorative practices into their classrooms based on the overview training provided at the district-wide professional development. District leaders planned to

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start RJ at the upper grades of elementary school, as they were uncertain how younger students would respond to the restorative practices. However, Angleton ISD teachers in grades as early as Kindergarten have reported success with restorative practices in the classroom.203

**Student Privacy**

Teachers initially expressed concern about the student information that would be shared in restorative practices. To maintain student privacy, teachers establish respect agreements with students that set the expectation that the information shared in restorative practices is private. The district has not received any complaints so far about breaches of privacy.

Source: Angleton ISD204

**TRAINING**

Angleton ISD provides multiple trainings for teachers and district staff on restorative practices. Each cohort of grade levels participates in initial training with Kevin Curtis in the spring prior to their cohort’s RJ implementation. For example, teachers in Grades 5, 6, and 9 participated in initial training in May 2015 prior to implementation in the 2015-16 school year, and teachers in Grades 4, 7, and 10 will participate in initial training in May 2016 in preparation for implementation in the 2016-17 school year. In addition to these initial cohort trainings, the district provides district-wide RJ training during August professional development days to give all district staff an overview of RJ.

Following this training, teachers implementing RJ for the first time during that school year receive two follow-up trainings with Curtis, with additional trainings as requested. The first cohort of teachers requested a third follow-up training to troubleshoot challenges they have encountered with restorative practices in the classroom. The district also created an email distribution list with all teachers in the first RJ cohort to provide a support system and forum for questions.205

Beyond the teachers in each cohort, the district also provides trainings for designated district and campus RJ coordinators. At the beginning of the district’s RJ implementation, each school principal selected an individual with influence on campus and interest in RJ to serve as the campus coordinator. The district and campus RJ coordinators participate in additional trainings with Curtis and serve as points of contact for teachers and school staff. District leaders hope that these coordinators will build capacity within the district, reducing reliance on external supports and making the RJ program more sustainable.206

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204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
EVALUATION

Although Angleton ISD has only been practicing restorative justice for a few months, the district is already seeing results. The number of discipline referrals and the number of discipline hearings (i.e., meetings with students who have received 10 discipline referrals) have declined. This may be due to teachers feeling a greater sense of ownership over discipline, as well as developing stronger relationships with students. The district plans to administer surveys to students and staff to assess their perceptions of the RJ program and the school climate. The district has not yet evaluated disciplinary data from RJ to examine changes in disproportionate disciplinary rates for certain subgroups.  

FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is a large, diverse, and high-achieving school system located in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. FCPS is in its fifth year of implementing a district-wide restorative justice (RJ) program.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Prior to 2010, a local non-profit organization provided RJ services to a few schools in FCPS through grants. Using experience from these programs and information on best practices in RJ nationwide, the FCPS Assistant Superintendent for Special Services developed a plan to scale up the programs across the district, with an initial focus on middle and high schools.

In 2011, FCPS hired an RJ specialist with experience as an RJ facilitator and trainer in Virginia’s criminal justice system. The RJ specialist’s responsibilities include developing and managing a system-wide RJ program, educating schools about the value of restorative justice, and training staff to facilitate RJ practices in the classroom as well as restorative justice conferences for discipline response. In 2013, the district hired a second RJ specialist. The specialists work to ensure RJ program fidelity across the district’s 200 schools through training and program monitoring.

The district’s restorative justice team, comprising the two specialists and five RJ practitioners, conduct the majority of RJ training and case management in the district. FCPS receives additional support on approximately 10 percent of cases from community facilitators, who serve as community representatives and neutral parties outside the school system, as well as a local mediation service. This local mediation service had previously

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207 Ibid.
208 “Fairfax County Public Schools.” New America Foundation. http://febp.newamerica.net/k12/VA/5101260
212 Restorative Justice Specialist, Fairfax County Public Schools. Telephone Interview.
213 Ibid.
considered partnering directly with the Fairfax County juvenile justice system, but found that juvenile justice personnel were either uninformed or unsupportive of restorative justice. FCPS, by contrast, had an interested and engaged leadership team, as well as small-scale programs already in place at some schools.\textsuperscript{214}

**MODEL**

Restorative justice in FCPS includes school-wide initiatives to improve school climate, as well as circles and restorative justice conferences, all of which are available throughout the FCPS system.\textsuperscript{215} In addition, middle school students have the opportunity to participate in Restorative Behavior Intervention (RBI), in which students who violate FCPS policies learn about appropriate steps to repair harm and develop a plan to implement those steps.\textsuperscript{216} Figure 2.7 describes the spectrum of RJ programs in FCPS.

**Figure 2.7: FCPS Restorative Justice Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevention</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restorative Practices in the Classroom</strong></td>
<td><strong>Preventative Circles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ philosophy and language for classroom management</td>
<td>Attendance groups, minor disputes, escalating conflicts, bullying education,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Available to all schools</em></td>
<td>teaching conflict resolution skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Available to all schools</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restorative Behavior Intervention</strong></td>
<td><strong>Restorative Justice Conference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative practices questions, deeper reflection activities and</td>
<td>Serious violations, student/staff conflicts, parent/staff conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement, circles, and RJ discipline conferences</td>
<td><em>Available to middle schools ONLY</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Available to all schools</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FCPS\textsuperscript{217}

Under a 2014 agreement with the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court (JDRDC), School Resource Officers may refer students to restorative justice conferences rather than automatically sending them into the JDRDC system.\textsuperscript{218}


Student Privacy

The FCPS restorative justice process optional and confidential, so all parents must give permission for students to participate. All restorative conference participants must sign confidentiality agreements. The district has not experienced many issues with breaches of student privacy, although school administrators would choose the proper consequence if a student broke the confidentiality agreement.

Source: Fairfax County Public Schools

TRAINING

FCPS invites all students, parents, and staff members to participate in training to become a certified RJ facilitator. Individuals with training, but not certification, may facilitate preventative practices. Individuals are required to complete higher levels of training, mentoring, and co-facilitation in order to facilitate higher-level RJ interventions. Depending on their level of certification, certified facilitators may lead circles and restorative conferences. FCPS modeled the RJ facilitator certification process after the Virginia Supreme Court process for certifying mediators. Figure 2.8 describes the certification requirements and training at FCPS.

Figure 2.8: FCPS RJ Certification Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Trained Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Attend orientation training: Understanding Restorative Justice in FCPS.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Available via online learning management system.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 2:</th>
<th>Certified Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Attend Restorative Justice Facilitator Training.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participants learn techniques to conduct circles for prevention and group intervention.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trainees must complete mentoring and co-facilitation process with a certified mentor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 3:</th>
<th>Advanced Certified Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Attend Advanced Facilitation of Cases of Serious Harm training.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participants learn how to facilitate individual cases of serious harm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trainees must complete advanced mentoring and co-facilitation process with a certified mentor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FCPS

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The district’s two RJ specialists lead all trainings, which ensures that all facilitators receive the same information. Additionally, FCPS employs five RJ practitioners who coordinate the restorative justice program in each region of the district. These staff members serve as mentors for certified RJ facilitators in the district. This continued support is critical to assisting facilitators with implementing restorative justice in practice, especially in challenging cases. FCPS currently has approximately 40 certified facilitators, and the number continues to increase. **Eventually, the district’s goal is to build each school-level RJ team to be self-sustaining without external support. Contacts expect this process to take eight to 10 years.**

**EVALUATION**

One of the biggest challenges RJ staff in FCPS face is changing the perception of restorative justice, as the shift from zero tolerance policies and a punitive culture to practices with “appropriate and reasonable consequences and personal accountability” is a long process. However, district staff find that if they can engage teachers or parents who are resistant to the concept of restorative justice in the process, they tend to become RJ supporters.

FCPS is in the process of collecting data on the ongoing RJ implementation. Staff collect participant feedback after RJ trainings and conferences, and track recidivism among students who have participated in the RJ process. Although the RJ process in FCPS serves a disproportionate number of students from certain subgroups (e.g., special education, free- and reduced-price lunch, minorities), the process is the same for all students and is beneficial for many types of students.

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224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
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