

EVALUATING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN THREE SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

Fidelity of Implementation and School Climate, Equity, and Safety Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

With the grant support of the Brooklyn Community Foundation, Restorative Justice (RJ) Coordinators and directors implemented RJ in collaboration with school staff and students. They worked together for 3.5 years in three middle and high schools.

The schools served mostly students from low-income areas, with two schools having a large majority of Black and Latinx students and one school having a greater mix of race/ethnicity.

The RJ school-wide initiatives were comprehensive. Efforts included both "prevention" and "intervention" through building community, strengthening relationships, and repairing harm when it occurred. All three schools also had an explicit focus on addressing racial and social justice.

Dr. Anne Gregory, Rutgers University, conducted a formative and summative evaluation of their RJ project. The final report draws on suspension records, surveys, and interviews from 2016-2019.

Key outcomes and recommendations are summarized here. For the full report, please contact Anne Gregory Ph.D., Rutgers University, annegreg@gsapp.rutgers.edu.



IMPLEMENTATION

We identified 11 indicators of RJ implementation with a total of 29 benchmarks. Across the years, all schools improved in implementation fidelity.

Two schools went from low to moderate fidelity, meeting between 35% to 45% of the benchmarks. One school achieved high fidelity, meeting 69% of the benchmarks.

While holding community-building circles in classrooms was shown to be a challenge of RJ implementation across all three schools, two schools demonstrated progress in gaining administrative support for RJ. Two schools also demonstrated progress in repairing harm using restorative processes.

That said, implementation gains were not uniform. RJ Coordinators and their colleagues confronted a range of obstacles and challenges which sometimes led to setbacks. We learned that RJ Coordinators often had to regularly co-envision and co-develop the comprehensive scope of the RJ project.

We found that the initiative required sustained and consistent administrative support, schoolwide buy-in, shared leadership, student advocates, adult mindset shifts, and policy/practice reform (see Figure 1).

Studies have shown that marginalized groups can be denied fair access to supportive, non-punitive approaches to discipline. In the three schools, survey results show diverse student groups had fair access to the RJ initiative. By 2019, Black students, students in special education, and sexual minority students all reported comparable RJ exposure relative to their peers.

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OUTCOMES

Student Survey Findings.

- Student sense of safety improved in two schools and maintained high levels in one school.
- Two schools also had slight decreases in the percentage of students reporting they had been threatened with a weapon.
- In two schools, a smaller percentage of survey respondents indicated they had been hit, pushed, or attacked one or more times.
- Student-reported suspensions decreased substantially in two schools and maintained low rates in one school.

Staff Survey Findings.

- The rates of staff-reported threats from students decreased in one school, maintained low levels in another school, and increased in the third school.
- The rates of staff reported physical altercations, specifically being hit, pushed, or attacked by a student, increased in two schools. An interview suggested that this may have been due to a few students with serious behavioral challenges.

District Records of Suspension.

- Compared to the three years prior, schools in the RJ Project had more than a 53% reduction in the average number of suspensions across the last three project years. In fact, two schools reduced the average number of suspensions by 73%.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that...

During the early stages of implementation, administrators and staff become familiar with a principle-based, comprehensive, and equity-oriented model of RJ.

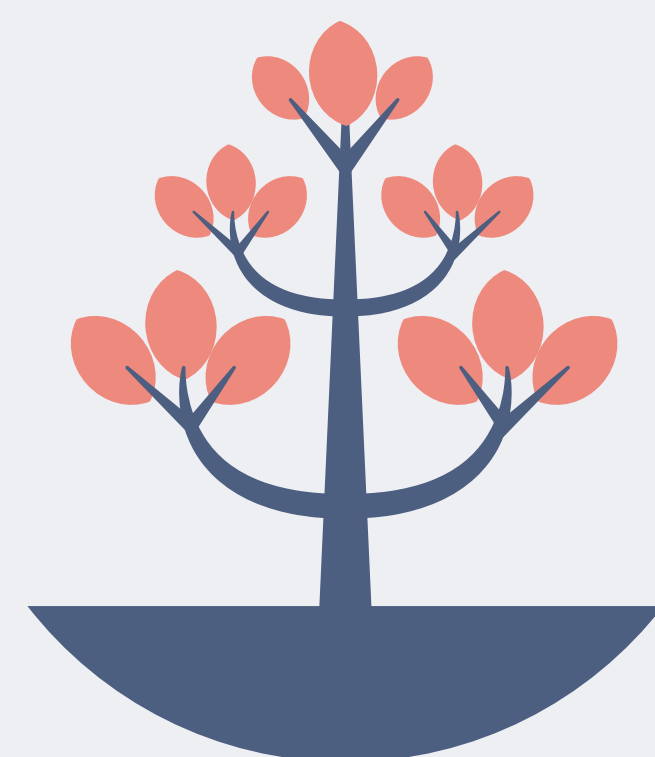
Administrators manage expectations whereby change will likely be incremental over an extended period of time.

Schools support teachers in implementing circles as part of instructional activities to help build community in classrooms.

Schools clearly link RJ with equity initiatives.

Schools continue to track a broad range of student outcomes, not just suspensions.

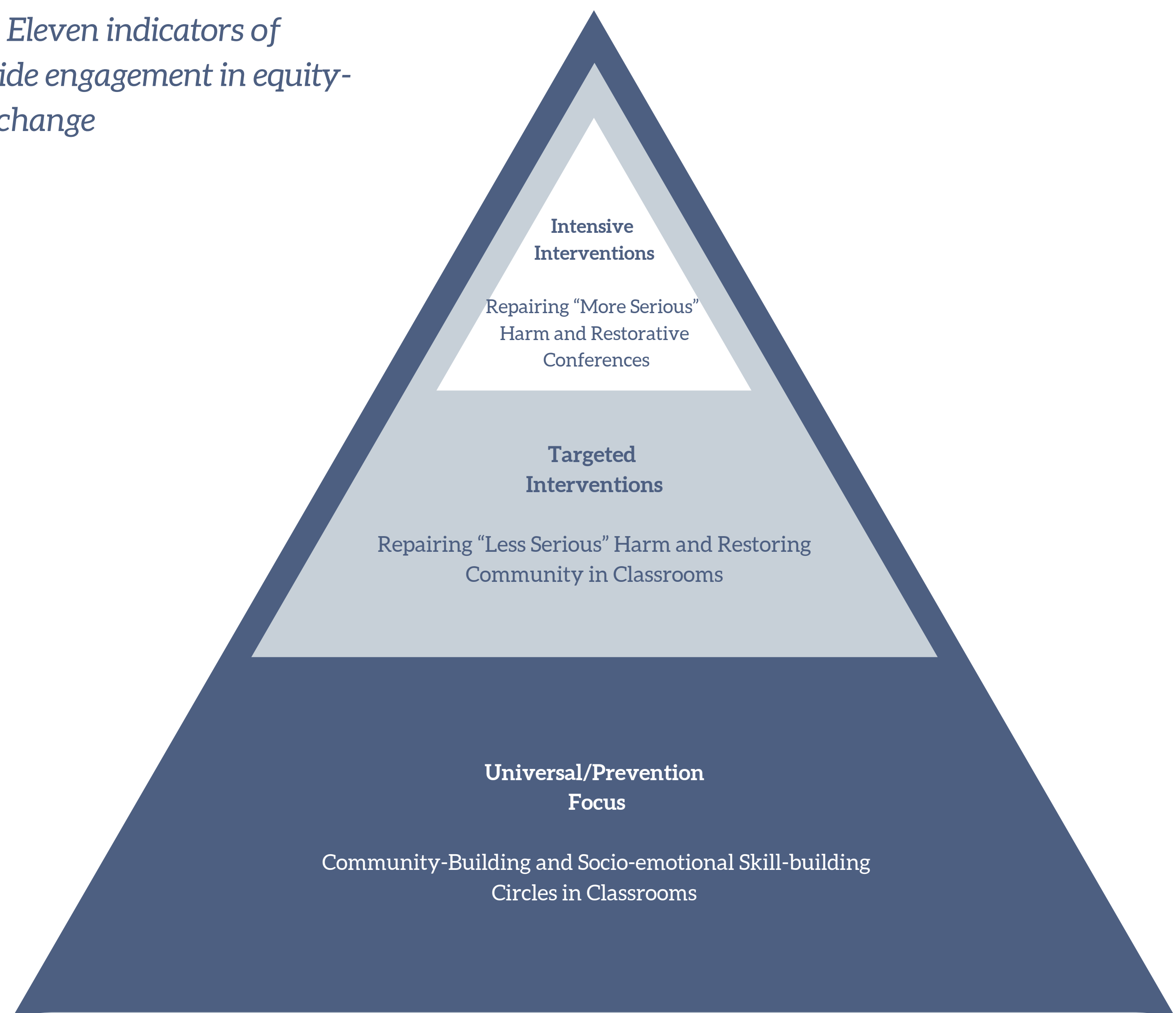
Schools attend to the well-being of staff (as well as students).



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Figure 1. *Eleven indicators of schoolwide engagement in equity-oriented change*



RJ Infrastructure

1. Administrative Support for RJ
2. Schoolwide RJ Buy-in and Leadership
3. Discipline Policy Reform
4. Data-based Decision-Making to Guide Change

RJ Capacity-building in Staff, Students, and Families

5. Addressing Equity and Social Justice
6. RJ Professional Development
7. RJ Student Leadership and Student Voice
8. RJ Family and Community Involvement

RJ Continuum of Support

9. Community-Building and Socio-emotional Skill-building Circles in Classrooms
10. Repairing "Less Serious" Harm and Restoring Community in Classrooms
11. Repairing "More Serious" Harm and Restorative Conferences