Evaluating Restorative Justice in Three Secondary Schools: Fidelity of Implementation and School Climate, Equity, and Safety Outcomes

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Urgency for connection, repair, and racial justice today
A Comprehensive Vision of RJ Using a Racial and Social Justice Lens
Insights from the RJ Coordinators/Directors

- Ashley Ellis
- Skye Roper-Moses
- Nicole Lavonne Smith
- Suzanne Hitchman
Special recognition: Students shared how they valued their RJ coordinators.

“The RJ Coordinator… I’ve never seen somebody so committed to making the school so much better.”
RJ coordinators’ equity initiatives were broad in scope:

- Increasing student agency and leadership opportunities;
- Changing policies/practices that have an unfair impact on some student groups;
- Engaging students and adults in open dialogue about marginalizing institutional practices;
- Implementing social justice education and culturally responsive instructional practices.
The circle is the container or the platform for the conversation...its mission is to end racism.”

Circling and other RJ practices “are the tools for what’s underlying, which is the racial justice lens and the relationship building.”
“...once you have that foundation of trust you’ll be able to have open and honest conversations about any and everything.”

Adults themselves need time to reflect on “...where they’ve been hurt” and “how we perpetuate that on our students, especially our black and brown students…”

Offered “teachers a restorative process” to engage in “conversation around racism and white supremacy.”
Fidelity of Implementation
Multiple methods over time

- Interviews with RJCs and CBOs
- School-reported suspension
- Student Interviews
- Student and Staff RJ Climate Surveys
Tracking fidelity of implementation through RJ Coordinators’ comprehensive vision of change

- Infrastructure (4 indicators)
- Capacity-Building (4 indicators)
- Tiers of Support (3 Indicators)
Three schools made progress in implementation.

Yet, schoolwide efforts included striving, set-backs, and triumphs.
Findings: Increasing Equity in Schools
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%.

Note: We see a pattern over time, but RJ and/or many other factors could explain this trend.
Students increasingly experienced more equitable school environments

By 2019, in all three schools, Black students, students in special education, and LGBTQI+ students reported similar:

- suspension rates
- sense of safety
- and sense of community
Fair access to RJ

RJ Use Scale:

- "My teachers use circles as a time for students to share feelings, ideas, and experiences." (circles)

- “My teachers take students’ thoughts and ideas into account when making decisions.” (fair process)

- “When someone misbehaves, my teachers have the person talk to who they hurt and asks them to make things right.” (restorative questions)
Open ended themes

“If you participated in a conference and/or circle, what did you *like* about the process?”

- Self-expression
- Everyone has a voice
- Positive quality of interactions
- Content of the circles
- Sharing and learning together
- Good listening and respect
- And, room for improvement.
The rates of staff-reported threats from students

- decreased in one school,
- maintained low levels in another school,
- increased in the third school.
Student sense of safety

Student sense of safety improved or was maintained.

In two of the schools, a slightly lower percentage of students reported being threatened and being hit, pushed or attacked.
Implications for NYC DOE roll out:

Principle-based, comprehensive, and equity-oriented model of RJ.

Long-term, incremental implementation planning.
Implications for NYC DOE roll out: Where to begin the work?

Build Community First. The place to start is not on the reactive end of the RJ continuum (mediation, conferencing), but on the preventative end (community- and relationship-building).

In one practitioner’s words, “The base of RJ is building community.”

- Start with adults or adults/students together
- Make it relevant to stakeholders
- Engage in capacity-building and policy change for sustainability
To assist in such planning, we wrote 12 Indicators of Restorative Practices Implementation: Checklists for Administrators.


(Also see Gregory & Evans, 2020, RJE NEPC brief)
https://nepc.colorado.edu/newsletter/2020/01/restorative-justice
Evaluating RJ in Three Secondary Schools

This summative report covers:

- Fidelity of Implementation
- School Climate
- Increasing Equity in the Schools
- School Safety and Exclusionary Discipline
- District-recorded Suspension
Thank you.

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