

Guideline for Campus Implementation of Restorative Approach

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INTRODUCTION

This guideline was developed as a resource for school staff and other individuals to facilitate the implementation of a restorative approach to discipline with an end goal of transforming school culture.

The tools and resources offered here are cited, designed, and developed to supplement the Uplifting Pupils Project (UP Project) developed by Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) and can also be used as guidance for implementing any other school-based restorative program.

The UP Project is a program offered by HCDE to help campuses transform from rule-based to relationship-based schooling by providing a series of workshops to introduce culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative activities, and program implementation evaluation.

The authors hope the guideline will provide practitioners and administrators additional ways to build reflection into their work and to use the data and feedback collected through these tools as a learning loop for continually improving practice, either through self-reflection or by using the information for coaching.

The guidelines were developed by the HCDE Research & Evaluation Institute (REI). We welcome your comments, feedback and questions.

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RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

Exclusionary vs. Restorative Approach

In the past few decades schools have responded to violence by adopting zero-tolerance policies under the assumption that imposing punitive consequences lead students to fix their misbehaviors resulting in more peaceful educational settings (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Fabelo et al., 2011). Literature on the subject considers zero-tolerance policies exclusionary because they remove students from school for a variety of violations, ranging from serious offenses, such as bodily injury, to minor offenses, such as dress code violations (Skiba, 2014).

A growing number of researchers and educators oppose zero-tolerance policies due to numerous concerns. First, rather than reducing behavioral issues, growing evidence has shown that more exclusionary practices are associated with higher rates of behavioral problems and future suspensions (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Raffaele-Mendz, 2003). Moreover, exclusionary practices, especially suspension, have been associated with lower academic achievement (Beck & Muschkin, 2012), higher rates of school dropout (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013), and higher involvement in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Another major concern of an exclusionary approach is that it has been applied disproportionately to students and caused inequity in education. A longitudinal study followed students in the Texas public school system and concluded that African American students (26.2%) were more likely to receive out-of-school suspension in response to a first infraction compared to Latinos (18%) and Whites (9.9%) (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). In Harris County, 10.9% of African American students received out-of-school suspension in 2016-2017 school year, which is four times higher than that of White students (2.5%) and more than twice that of Hispanic students (4.3%) (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Furthermore, when Dan Losen and colleagues (2015) examined out-of-school suspension rates in every school district in the nation from 1972 to 2012, the data indicated that suspensions increased overall in the past 40 years, as well as the gap in the suspension rates for White students and students of color increased. The authors also examined the rates within states and districts and found that exclusionary policies were associated with the disciplinary gap.

Because of these findings, schools are seeking alternatives to replace exclusionary policies in hopes of reducing the reliance on school exclusion and reducing the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the discipline system (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). The restorative approach, which emphasizes the building and repairing of relationships, has been embraced in the past two decades worldwide. However, this approach is still the margin rather than the mainstream in educational settings (Vaandering, 2010).

The philosophy under restorative approach is that “all the stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice” and should be included on the “decision of what should be done to repair the harm” (Braithwaite, 2004: 28; Pedreal, 2014). Such justice was understood more in terms of a relationship than in judging right from wrong (Vaandering, 2010). The Restorative approach considers misconducts to be violations of relationships and requires offenders to take responsibility for their actions and try to repair the harm they caused, for example, by apologizing or doing community services (Pedreal, 2014). Students and teachers are also encouraged to talk about the misbehaviors and its effect on the relationship.

Effectiveness of the Restorative Approach

Previous literature commonly reported the success of restorative approach in terms of the reduction of suspensions, expulsions, and office referrals for behavioral issues (Vaandering, 2010). Wong and colleagues (2011) conducted a two-year, multi-campus quasi-experiment to examine the effectiveness of a restorative program in reducing and preventing students' bullying behaviors. Researchers found that the students who participated in the restorative program showed a significant reduction of bullying behaviors, higher empathic attitudes, and higher self-esteem in comparison to students who partially participated or did not participate in the program at all.

With increasing evidence that reveals the effectiveness of a restorative approach in reducing suspensions and office referrals, educators are more likely to consider a restorative approach as a strategy or intervention to manage or control students' behaviors. The activities based on a restorative approach are commonly introduced in schools as communication techniques and tools. However, proponents of restorative approach argue that the failure of an exclusionary approach is more than a failure of "strategy". The negative effects of exclusionary discipline are rooted in the punitive mindset which is a product of the systematic and institutional power of schooling (Vaandering, 2010). In other words, the problems are caused by the philosophy and values of an exclusionary approach. Thus, the proponents are calling for efforts to transform schools from rule-based to a relationship-based through a restorative approach (Vaandering, 2014).

Vaandering (2014) argued that such systemic change requires its participants to have an awareness of critical consciousness (Freire, 2005) of the structures that currently constrain them. A restorative approach, with its philosophical foundation, should be used as a framework that contrasts with the common hierarchical, power-based structure of an exclusionary approach. When a restorative approach is used as a strategy, its potential of transforming a school's culture and environment is limited, as it would be rooted in the same power relationships underlying the exclusionary one (Vaandering, 2014).

McCluskey et al. (2008) identified that the central challenge of implanting a restorative approach is stakeholder's values and mindsets, which keep stakeholders in their default positions. For instance, despite the relational foundation of a restorative approach, educators and schools continue to emphasize its value as a strategy for changing students' behaviors (Morrison, 2007). Such values and mindsets are evident in training content, supporting resources, resulting practices, and research reports. McCluskey et al. (2008) named it as "taken for granted" structures and systems of an exclusionary approach in schools.

Reimer (2011) conducted a qualitative case study which explored the implementation of a restorative program within one Ontario public school. This study examined not only the effectiveness of the program in reducing suspensions and office referrals, but also how teachers and administrators think and feel about the employment of the restorative approach. The findings suggested that if the necessary structures, cultural systems, and mindset shifts are not in place, it is difficult to sustain a school-wide restorative program.

Based on the evidence, proponents of a restorative approach call for an educational revolution which aims to shift from rule-based to relationship-based schooling. A restorative approach and activities have the potential to change the culture of the school environment, which is much more than a "strategy" or a "tool" that is used to control or manage students' behaviors.

Common Mistakes When Implementing a Restorative Approach

To achieve the restorative approach’s potential, stakeholders need to understand the nature of change, identify the difficulties around change, and comprehend why people resist change. A common problem when implementing a restorative approach in schools is that the leader thinks that announcing the change is equivalent to implementation (Zigarni, et al., 2006). Leaders may be enthusiastic to announce what is going to happen, often exposing the whole staff to the principles and practice or conducting a short-term training without providing additional support and ongoing dialogue (Williams, 2015). A schoolwide implementation is hard to be successful without ongoing dialogue and a strategy in place to managing the change process. With this in mind, it is important to note that changing school culture does not happen overnight and often takes several years.

Kotter (2012) listed eight major and common mistakes during the implementation of a school-wide restorative approach, with the reasons for making those mistakes. The mistakes and reasons are presented in the following table as a reference to think about the restorative approach and its implementation (Thorsbome & Blood, 2013).

Table 1. Eight common mistakes during the implementation of restorative approach

Mistakes	Reason for making mistakes
Allowing complacency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not establishing a great enough sense of urgency—making a clear statement that doing things the way we do them is no longer acceptable • Not understanding or creating the need for change—why a change initiative is required • Not having the right person in charge to lead the change initiative or understanding that change requires a particular skill-set
Failing to build a powerful guiding coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not creating a powerful enough coalition early in the change process to help drive the change • Relying on one or two people to lead the change initiative • Key people in critical positions are not on board and/or are not given time on develop a change vision and how to achieve this • Underestimating the challenges of the change initiative • Lacking strong leadership from above to help drive the change
Failing to develop a vision for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking a clear, simple-to-understand and big enough vision for change • Failing to adjust the vision as the change process is implemented—potentially altering the direction of change
Failing to communicate the vision for buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to lead by example and to ‘walk the talk’—behavior that is inconsistent with the change initiative • Failing to incorporate the change initiative into ongoing communication and correspondence • Allowing processes to remain in place when found to be inconsistent with the change initiative • Failing to treat people affected by the change process fairly • Failing to indicate whether proposed solutions align with the change initiative

Mistakes	Reason for making mistakes
Failing to plan for and generate short-term wins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to confront and remove obstacles to the new vision • Allowing processes to remain in place which are inconsistent with the change initiative • Leaders who refuse to change and/or make demands that are inconsistent with the change initiative • Failing to empower others or to hear the creative ideas that change processes generate
Failing to plan for and generate short-term wins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not systematically planning for and creating short-term wins • No evidence of tangible change within 12-24 months
Declaring victory too soon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgency of change not intense • Failing to understand that renewal efforts take years rather than months or a one-off session
Failing to anchor the new approaches into the culture of the school—making it stick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not anchoring change in the organization’s culture, ‘the way we do things around here’ • Removing the pressure for change before change is embedded • Not demonstrating how the change initiative has had a positive impact • Failing to employ people that personify the change initiative

(Kotter, 2012; cited from Thorsborne & Blood, 2013)

READINESS PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION

To achieve successful implementation of a school-wide restorative approach, it is important to clearly understand the school's existing climate, nature, issues, and resources before the implementation. It should also be noted that a restorative approach is most successfully implemented when there is buy-in from all stakeholders (school employees, parents/guardians, students, and community members).

Readiness Assessment

Prior to implementation, a readiness assessment is necessary. The following table provides an example which can be completed by administrators and staff as a group.

Table 2. Readiness Assessment Checklist

Statement	Yes	No	Note:
1. My school has assessed the issues caused by exclusionary discipline			<p>a. Administrator, teachers and staff can attend workshop/ training regarding restorative approach and activities; schools can employ train-the-trainers approach to save cost</p> <p>b. The parents can be provided flyers, brochure, or be invited to attend workshop hosted by schools</p>
2. There is a need to improve both student-teacher relationship and other relationships in my school			
3. The administrators in my school received training to understand the institutional powers underlying schooling and the potentials of a restorative approach in transforming the school environment and culture			
4. The teachers and staff in my school received training to understand the institutional powers underlying schooling and the potentials of a restorative approach in transforming the school environment and culture			
5. The administrators, teachers, and staff have reached an agreement that repairing harm done to relationships and people is more important than assigning blame and dispensing punishment			
6. The administrators in my school received training to learn about restorative techniques (e.g. restorative circles, restorative conferences, peer mediation, Peer/ Accountability Boards)			

Statement		Yes	No	Note:
7.	The teachers and staff in my school received training to learn about restorative techniques (e.g. restorative circles, restorative conferences, peer mediation, Peer/ Accountability Boards)			<p>c. If all items in this checklist have been marked as “Yes”, your school is ready to implement a restorative program</p> <p>d. It is important to note that the checklist is just an example. Schools are encouraged to develop their own checklist based on their specific and unique situations.</p>
8.	The administrators, teachers, and staff have reached an agreement that restorative approach addresses the issues in my school and responds to my school’s needs			
9.	The principal in my school is willing to support ongoing coaching for teachers and staff regarding a restorative approach and program			
10.	The teachers and staff in my school have been provided an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions regarding an implementation of a restorative program			
11.	The administrators, teachers, and staff in my school have reached an agreement to implement a restorative program			
12.	My school has established or has a plan to establish a team to lead the implementation of the restorative program			
13.	My school has communicated with our school district and obtained the district’s approval to implement a restorative program			

(Developed by the HCDE Research & Evaluation Institute)

Trainings and Workshops

Trainings providing information on the theoretical foundation and techniques of a restorative approach are essential for successful implementation. Once the initial group receives these training, a train-the-trainer model can be utilized to allow trained educators to disseminate information to their colleagues. Utilizing a train-the-trainer reduces training costs. Less money, or perhaps no money, has to be expended for future staff training. In addition, this model allows trained staff to offer support to their newly trained colleagues by being readily available to answer questions, resolve problems, and provide supervision and encouragement while simultaneously enhancing sustainability of the implementation (Pancucci, 2007).

Four of the most popular restorative activities in schools are outlined below (Pavelka, 2013: p. 15):

1 Circles

The circle process includes the wrongdoer, those affected by the occurrence (e.g. victim and family), and relevant community members (e.g. justice system officials, social service staff, law enforcement, and neighbors). The circle keeper, or facilitator of the process, uses talking piece which is passed around the circle to the individual speakers. Each individual addresses how the wrongful occurrence has affected them and offers ways to seek reparation. Based on the traditional practices used by indigenous tribes, the use of circles in schools has expanded beyond wrong doing to include improvement of classroom management techniques, conversations on difficult topics, and problem resolution.

2 Peer Mediation

Peer mediation is the most common and broadly accepted restorative practice (O'Brien, 2000; Pavelka, 2013). With this intervention, students mediate conflicts between two or more disputants. Using peer mediation requires utilizing conflict solution skills and social competencies to reduce the threat of violence and increase peace in schools. The successful outcome of peer mediation is resolution of the conflict so all disputants benefit; the relationships are repaired and more often improved.

3 Peer/Accountability Boards

Peer/Accountability Boards require the participation of board members, composed of student peers and includes the victim(s), and wrongdoer(s). The participants identify the impact of the offense, determine responsibility and accountability, and develop an individualized case plan for the wrongdoer. The case plan is tailored to incorporate consequences and accountability, while also addressing the needs of the wrongdoer. Components of the case plan may include but are not limited to: letters of apology and restitution to the victim, tutoring, mentoring, counseling, and community services.

4 Conferencing

Compared to Peer Mediation and Peer/Accountability Boards, conferencing involves a wider and larger group of participants focusing on those most affected by the occurrence (e.g. the victim, the offender, family, friends, and key supporters). A trained facilitator guides discussion on how all affected parties have been harmed by the offense. The goal is to seek reparation and resolution of the wrongdoing. The processes of conferencing and circles may be longer in duration due to the process to reach the final agreement.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation Plan

Schoolwide implementation of a restorative approach is a long process which may take three to five years (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). One way to make the process manageable is using a staged implementation plan, such as the following example:

1. Identify a core group of staff who show interest in a restorative approach and work with them first.
2. Develop a framework and essential documentation, such as discipline policies and a schedule and procedures for restorative activities, with a core group of staff. How elaborate the program is should be based on the needs of the school. There is no a standard framework. Each school should develop its own framework to address its unique needs
3. Secure buy-in of stakeholders, such as teachers, staff, students, and parents, which is an ongoing process during the implementation.
4. Implement the program based on the designed framework and developed documentation, which should be reviewed and adjusted annually to meet the school's needs.
5. Conduct a program evaluation to assess outcomes and effectiveness of the program. The program evaluation may be conducted annually to provide evidence to guide or support revisions of the framework and documentation.

Tracking Progress

Consistent reflection is an important part of a restorative implementation. Tracking progress allows both leaders and other stakeholders to pay attention to areas where important strategies need to be applied to maintain consistency. Tracking can be conducted either after each activity or on a regularly scheduled timeline. The following checklist is an example for schools to consider:

Table 3. Implementation Progress Survey/Observation Checklist

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Note:
<i>Satisfaction with Teachers and Staff</i>					
1. The teacher/staff can effectively assess situations					a. These items can be included in an observation checklist for an independent observer
2. The teacher/staff shows capability to plan and conduct an effective restorative activity					
3. The teacher/staff is knowledgeable in the restorative approach/ techniques					b. These items can be applied after each restorative activity (e.g.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Note:
Satisfaction with Teachers and Staff					
4. The teacher/staff shows capability to facilitate the development of agreements that include how to repair the harm and to avoid additional harm.					restorative circle, conference, mediation, etc.) is conducted
Satisfaction with Restorative Activities					
5. The teacher/staff is well prepared					a. These items can be included in a survey for activity participants or an observation checklist for independent observer
6. The restorative activity (e.g. restorative circle, conference, mediation, etc.) is conducted as expected					
7. The restorative activity (e.g. restorative circle, conference, mediation, etc.) provides a safe place for participants to talk about problems and their feelings					
8. Participants are treated with respect during the activity					
9. The activity is a fair way to deal with the situation					
10. The activity effectively repairs/improves the relationships					
Satisfaction of Support					
11. Teachers and staff are allowed to take sufficient time to resolve the problems					a. These items can be used as a survey distributed to teachers and staff
12. Teachers and staff are provided an appropriate space for restorative activities					b. The survey can be distributed in

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Note:
<i>Satisfaction of Support</i>					
13. Teachers and staff are provided appropriate guidance for restorative activities					a regular term, such as every quarter, bi-year, or annual
14. Teachers and staff are provided sufficient supplies for restorative activities					
15. The results of restorative activities are regularly reviewed and discussed					
16. Teachers and staff regularly participate in staff restorative activities					

PROGRAM EVALUATION

As part of the implementation process, independent program evaluations can provide a more complete picture of the impact of using a restorative approach by assessing implementation, school climate, and students' outcomes, with a focus on relationships. Evaluation methods may include surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups.

Surveys can be used for various purposes, including but not limited to assessing participants satisfaction with the implementation process and outcomes, identifying changes in school climate, and measuring the shift in stakeholders' values and mindsets. Analyzing survey results to determine the impact of a restorative approach requires statistical analysis and an understanding of research methodology. Prior to deciding on a program evaluation plan, schools should consult with experienced researchers or evaluators to determine effective data collecting strategies and identify the best approach to analyze the data.

Suggested timing for conducting individual or focus group interviews is after a year or more of implementation when interviewees have participated in several restorative activities. Conducting interviews will help researchers and evaluators gain in-depth information that cannot be collected by surveys. Each Focus Group generally consists of six to ten interviewees, and two professional researchers whose role is to ask questions and keep the group on task.

Students' outcomes, specifically behavior improvement, can be measured by the school's office referral numbers and by a school safety survey. Raising students' academic outcomes is not a direct effect of a restorative approach, as academic outcomes are impacted by many other factors such as teachers' experience, school facilities, and so on. In theory, a restorative approach has the potential to improve students' academic outcomes by changing a school's climate and pedagogy. The suggested timing for assessing students' academic outcomes is after two years or more of implementation when schools have had enough time to reflect on the impact of the restorative approach on students' learning.

Conducting program evaluation requires professional skills and techniques. Consultation with professional researchers in data collection and analyses is encouraged. For an evaluation design meets the definitions of both "research" and "human subjects", the designer(s) must apply for an approval from Institutional Review Boards (IRB). Code of Federal Regulations 46.102 defined "research" as "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalized knowledge", and "human subjects" as "a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information."

The Research & Evaluation Institute (REI) at HCDE provides IRB reviews and approval services. We welcome schools, school districts, and individual educators to consult with us for general information of program evaluation, data collection and analyses, statistics, and IRB application. Contact Darlene Breaux, director of REI, at 713-696-8291, or dbreaux@hcde-texas.org.

CONCLUSION

Exclusionary discipline policies have been increasingly criticized by researchers and educators for being overly punitive and disproportionately applied to minority students. Over the past two decades, schools nationally and internationally have tried to employ a restorative approach to replace exclusionary discipline policies. However, many so-called restorative programs have introduced a restorative approach as an alternative strategy to control students' behaviors. Proponents in this field insist that a restorative approach, implemented appropriately and rooted in its philosophical foundation, has the potential to transform a school's culture and environment., thus should be considered as a framework rather than a strategy.

This guideline embraces a critical perspective and encourages education administrators and practitioners to think about the impact of institutional and context powers during the implementation of a school-wide restorative approach. By increasing supports from all stakeholders, the challenges that the restorative approach has encountered in today's schools will ultimately be overcome.

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