

**Research Question** – What steps still need to be taken to implement restorative practices in the Albuquerque Public Schools?

### **Rationale**

Restorative practices come from the idea of restorative justice, which focuses on repairing harm done instead of merely administering punishment. In schools, restorative practices also focus on social and emotional learning so that students learn how to interact with and treat others. These practices strive to create a safe environment for students where they can solve conflicts in a constructive way and learn from difficult situations (Clifford).

In 2020, the Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) Board of Education showed its commitment to using restorative practices in schools when it crafted, in conjunction with the New Mexico School Boards Association, a resolution asking for the creation of state policy that would guide schools through the process of implementing restorative practices. However, implementation of restorative practices takes time, and the process is just beginning at many schools in APS.

It has become clear that traditional discipline is problematic. School suspensions cause students to lose instructional days. For students of color, these concerns are even more serious. Students of color are disproportionately suspended, and thus have greater loss of instructional time and a higher probability of dropping out of school (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

Restorative practices provide an alternative to traditional school discipline. Instead of suspending a student, a dialogue is started in which the student learns how their actions impacted others and how they can repair the harm done. The emphasis is on teaching students how to treat other people to improve their long-term behavior. “Restorative Practices are based on principles that emphasize the importance of positive relationships as central to building community, and involves processes that repair relationships when harm has occurred” (Berkowitz, p. 1). One district saw a 13% decrease in student suspensions in schools that used restorative practices, and the decrease was even more significant for African American students (Augustine, Engberg, Grimm, Lee, Wang, Christianson, Joseph, 2018, p. 49).

### **Literature Review**

In the book *Better Than Carrots and Sticks*, Smith, Fisher, and Frey (2015) point out that student behavior is a form of communication, and “*problematic behaviors signal a student’s lack of skills for responding appropriately to difficult situations*. Just as students need teachers to teach them grammar and math, they need us to teach them how to respond properly to events”

(p. 11). Traditional discipline provides punishment, whereas restorative practices teach students the skills they need to interact with others (Smith, Fisher, Frey, 2015). The authors point out that changing from traditional discipline to restorative practices takes work. It requires a shift in thinking. “[I]t takes more than attending a few professional development seminars and reading some research literature to implement effective restorative practices; the process requires buy-in across the entire school and must relentlessly focus on examining long-held practices” (p. 92).

The San Francisco Unified School District has created a whole-school restorative practices implementation guide in an effort to use these practices district-wide. The guide outlines nine necessary components to implement restorative practices, as follows: (Berkowitz)

- Restorative Practices Introduction to Entire School Community
- Identifying Need and Preferred Outcomes
- Establishing School Site Implementation Team
- Collecting School Climate and Discipline Baseline Data
- Establishing the Foundation for a Welcoming and Safe School Culture
- Restorative Practices Professional Development
- Systems of Support (Professional Learning Communities)
- Progress Checks (measuring outcomes)
- Sustainability (p. 2)

In *Implementing Restorative Justice in Schools: Lessons Learned from Restorative Justice Practitioners in Four Brooklyn Schools*, the participating schools that successfully implemented restorative practices found that a comprehensive approach is necessary. All stakeholders need to be on board. They also stress that administrative support is crucial. “Administrators can help to ensure RJ is not marginalized but, instead, is infused into everyday activities” (Gregory, Soffer, Gaines, Hurley, Karikhalli, 2016, p. 2).

In the article *Needs and readiness assessments for implementing school-wide restorative practices*, the authors are clear that assessments need to be done before using restorative practices and then continued on a regular basis in order to ensure that the practices are implemented smoothly (Garnett, Moore, Kidde, Ballysingh, Kervick, Bedinger, Smith, Sparks, 2019). “Regular assessments are needed to identify implementation needs, barriers and supports to ensure that school-wide reform efforts maintain student and faculty buy-in and ownership to support implementation fidelity” (2019).

## Study Design

In order to understand to what extent restorative practices are being implemented in the Albuquerque Public Schools and to gauge educator understanding of these practices, I created a Google Form with seven questions. I surveyed educators represented by the Albuquerque Teachers Federation. I asked them how much they know about restorative justice or restorative practices and if they feel these practices are beneficial. I asked if their schools have implemented restorative practices and to what extent. I also asked if families had been involved in the process, and about what else they felt they need in order to build a restorative culture at their sites. The surveys were anonymous. Educators could include the name of their school, but

that information was not required. Participants had the opportunity to type in additional information they wanted to share.

## **Results**

Forty-nine educators responded to the survey, representing 26 different APS schools. Over 75% of participants feel that restorative practices are beneficial in the school environment. Just under 45% of respondents have both received professional development around restorative practices and are implementing these practices in their schools. Only 6.1% of respondents feel that their schools implement restorative practices consistently. In the schools that had tried to implement restorative practices to some extent, only 18.4% of participants could say that families have been involved in the implementation.

Educators who responded to the survey spoke of what their sites would need in order to implement restorative practices fully. Almost 60% of respondents stated a need for professional development. Many mentioned the need to see restorative practices modeled. Participants consider buy-in from staff and administration to be critical. Extra staffing and involving families was also mentioned. Implementing restorative practices consistently was also thought to be important.

## **Recommendations**

If we are serious as a district about using restorative practices in order to teach students how to interact instead of continuing to use traditional methods of discipline, there are several steps we need to consider. Creating a district plan for how to implement restorative practices provides a roadmap for schools and allows schools to collaborate on how to improve implementation. Taking the time to obtain buy-in from the entire school community is necessary. This includes families, staff members, and especially administrators. Support from building leaders is critical in the implementation process.

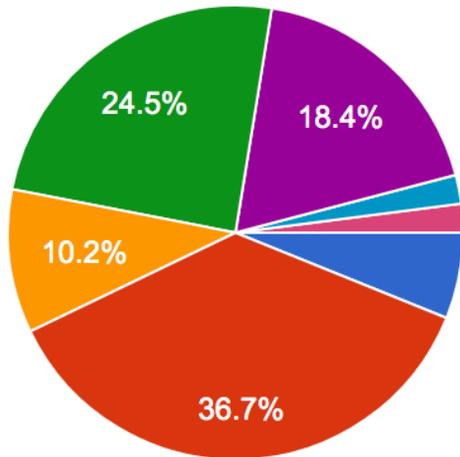
Fully implementing restorative practices takes time. Schools will need ongoing professional development in order to be successful. This includes assessing the needs of each school and providing preliminary training before initiating restorative practices. Additional assessment and professional development must follow as the school moves forward. These steps will ensure consistent implementation and allow the voices of practitioners and the community to be heard throughout the process.

## References

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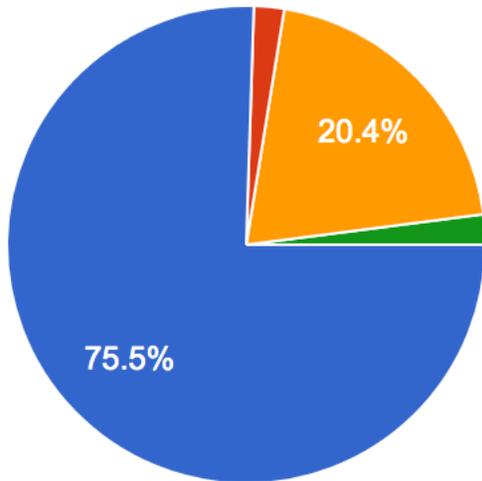
## Appendix

How familiar are you with restorative practices?



- I have never heard of restorative practices.
- I am familiar with restorative practices but have not received any professional development In how to implement them.
- I have attended professional development focused on restorative practices but have not started using what I learned.
- I have attended professional development focused on restorative practices and have begun implementation.
- I have implemented restorative practices in my school/workplace, and I have created a restorative culture.
- I have attended professional development and implemented RJ practices in my previous school/workplace. I maintained a restorative culture. My current school does not practice RJ.
- I have had over 60 hours of training on how to run peer mediation and conflict resolution programs from AmeriCorps in 1996. I think there's some overlap.

Do you think restorative practices are beneficial in the school environment?



- Yes
- No
- I am not sure.
- I think they can be.

Does your school implement restorative practices?

