Measuring Restorative Practices to Support Implementation in K–12 Schools

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February 2023

PACE
Policy Analysis for California Education

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Acknowledgements

This report, like all PACE publications, has been thoroughly reviewed for factual accuracy and research integrity. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy of the report contents.

Suggested Citation
Darling-Hammond, S., & Gregory, A. (2023, February). *Measuring restorative practices to support implementation in K–12 schools* [Report]. Policy Analysis for California Education. edpolicyinca.org/publications/measuring-restorative-practices-support-implementation-k-12-schools

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Executive Summary

School leaders across the state seek tools to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline and improve school climates. Research suggests that restorative practices (RPs) have the potential to achieve these ends, particularly when staff throughout the school implement, and students throughout the school experience, these practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, 2021, 2022; Gregory et al., 2016, 2018, 2021; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Research also indicates that schools often struggle to achieve widespread adoption of RPs (Garnett et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2021). In many cases, schools will see selective adoption of RPs—some teachers use these practices while others do not (resulting in only some students experiencing these practices). And districts will see some schools implementing these practices while others struggle to do so. How can schools overcome these implementation challenges?

The first step is to identify sticking points in implementation. To do this, school and district leaders need simple, reliable means of measuring the extent to which teachers are using and students are experiencing RPs. At present, though, many leaders lack measures of RP utilization and exposure. This report provides detailed guidance regarding why, when, and how to measure the use of RPs in schools.

In the first section, we briefly describe what RPs are and summarize research regarding the potential of these practices to decrease the use of discipline, reduce racial disparities in discipline and academic achievement, and improve school climates. In the second section, we discuss why measuring RP implementation is essential to employing RPs in a manner that is likely to achieve the intended impacts. In the third section, we provide detailed guidance on how to measure the extent to which teachers are using and students are being exposed to these potent practices.

Restorative Practices in Schools

In this first section, we discuss the reasons many schools have adopted RPs, provide some grounding in what these practices are, and summarize research regarding whether and under what conditions RPs can improve outcomes for students and schools.

The Shift to Restorative Practices

Why have so many schools shifted from exclusionary discipline to restorative approaches? One major reason is that recent research has documented the harms of exclusionary discipline. Tracking data from more than 9,000 students in grade school and for 12 years thereafter, Rosenbaum (2020) found that students who experienced suspension for the first time between 1995 and 1996 were 6 percent less likely to have earned a high school diploma, 24 percent less likely to have earned a bachelors degree, 30 percent more likely to have been arrested once, and 51 percent more likely to have been arrested two or more times, compared with similar nonsuspended students. Recent research has found that students who experience suspensions exhibit higher rates of mental health challenges like depression (Eyllon et al., 2020) and are more likely to express feeling disconnected from their school environments (Darling-Hammond, 2022). Correlation, of course, is not causation. However, Bacher-Hicks et al. (2019) leveraged causal estimation techniques to explore outcomes for students assigned to more punitive schools. They found that exclusionary discipline caused steep declines in academic performance and increases in arrest and adult incarceration rates for all evaluated subgroups of students (e.g., White, Black, male, female). Attending a school with a high suspension rate thus exerted a negative impact on students regardless of their demographic subgroup.

Of course, schools do not employ exclusionary discipline with the aim of harming students. Schools use suspensions and other forms of exclusion to deter misbehavior and avoid the harms that can result from students engaging in or experiencing bullying and violence (Adams, 2014; Bagley, 1914; Casella, 2003; Ewing, 2000; Griffith & Tyner, 2019; Kafka, 2011; Matthews & Agnew, 2008). Yet research suggests that exclusionary discipline may have ironically criminogenic effects. Analyzing detailed data from New York City public schools, LiCalsi et al. (2021) found that students who received an out-of-school suspension subsequently misbehaved more than similarly situated students who did not receive an out-of-school suspension. This finding, that suspensions might encourage misbehavior, accords with research that suggests that exposure to exclusionary discipline might lead students to distrust and feel defiant towards adults in their school (Pesta, 2021; Rosenbaum, 2020; Way, 2011). Research also suggests that using more exclusionary discipline can harm the school climate for students who are suspended and even for those who are not (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019).

Given that extant research indicates that exclusionary discipline can negatively affect students' behavioral, psychological, academic, carceral, and school-climate outcomes, it is not surprising that many schools have sought alternatives to exclusionary discipline and explored RPs.

Another reason many schools have shifted towards RPs is because Black students are more likely to be disciplined than White students, as shown in national data (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Federal guidance has suggested that RPs can help stem racial disparities in discipline (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). While 3.6 percent of White students will experience an out-of-school suspension during a given school year, 14.1 percent of Black students will receive an out-of-school suspension during the same timeframe, so Black students are 3.9 times more likely than White students to experience this form of exclusionary discipline (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Black students are also more likely than White students to receive out-of-school suspensions in a wide range of subgroups (e.g., gender, disability status) and contexts (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Research indicates that racial disparities in discipline are largely a function of school practices (Barrett et al., 2021; Gilliam et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Huang & Cornell, 2017; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Okonofua et al., 2016, 2020; Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Shi & Zhu, 2022), suggesting that shifting school practices could help reduce these racial disparities. Given the federal government's explicit endorsement of RPs as a strategy to ameliorate racial disparities in discipline (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2014), it is perhaps unsurprising that so many schools have adopted these practices.

Defining the Alternative: What Are Restorative Practices?

RPs encompass a wide array of activities designed to repair harm when conflict occurs and to improve relationships proactively so that misbehavior is less common (Gregory et al., 2020). The practices are guided by core beliefs: RP practitioners believe that students in healthy relationships develop a sense of belonging and community. Positive connections in the group lead to commitments to uphold norms in the community and to be accountable to one another (reducing the chances of doing harm or of misbehavior). RP practitioners further believe that it takes intentional work to build relationships and nurture socially just communities. And practitioners believe that problem-solving approaches to conflict can be used both to help people take responsibility for harm done and to meet the needs of those who are harmed (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Relationship- and community-centered approaches to conflict are not new but reach back to multiple Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations of North America, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand (Restorative Practice Consortium, 2017).

The first RPs formally introduced into schools were repair practices often described by the related term *restorative justice*. As theorists explain (see, for example, González, 2012; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Zehr, 2002), in the K–12 setting repair practices are meant to bring together all stakeholders to resolve issues rather than control student misbehavior through punitive exclusionary approaches. Repair practices can be as informal as conflict-responsive dialogue techniques or as formal as expert-guided restorative conferences with students, staff, and other stakeholders. Formal conferences can include victims, misbehaving students (often described as "respondents," as they are asked to respond to, or repair, the harm they've caused), and facilitators but may also include community members (e.g., witnesses, friends, family members).

The term *victim* is often used broadly and can include school community members who speak to the general harm caused by respondents' actions (such as students who worry the school is less safe after a peer engages in vandalism). Together, all the conference participants (including the respondent) aim to determine a reasonable and restorative response to the harm done. Responses can include community service, restitution, apologies, or agreements to change specific behaviors, such as the respondent agreeing to comply with certain conditions (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

The second body of RPs focus on community building. These practices are designed to foster an interconnected school community and healthy school climate in which punishable transgressions are less common (Brown, 2017). The best-known community-building practices are community-building circles, which are semiregular convenings (e.g., "each Monday morning in homeroom") structured to help students and staff deepen relationships and trust so that misbehavior becomes less common. Another common community-building practice is the re-entry circle. In these circles, community members gather to help students who have been removed from the school community (because of out-of-school suspensions, for example) feel reintegrated into the community. These circles are designed to ensure that returning community members have the social support needed to thrive (and to avoid misbehaviour). A final group of community-building practices are practices designed to help students develop their social and emotional capacities to manage conflict when it occurs. These include role-playing conflict situations, reflecting on past conflicts, and discussing sources of stress and anxiety in students' lives. Capacity-development activities often occur during community-building circles.

Although we divide RPs into two big buckets, prior work (Costello et al., 2013; Gregory et al., 2017) has identified a wide array of RPs. We present these practices within our simplified framework in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Restorative Practices That Schools May Implement

Community- and skill-building practices with students, staff, and families	Repair practices with students, staff, and families
• Community-building circles • Circles to honor the cultures and experiences of community members • Reintegrative management of shame • Conflict resolution skills (including problem-solving, self-regulation, conflict coaching, etc.) • Social-emotional skills (self and social awareness, empathy and perspective-taking, making and maintaining positive relationships, etc.)	• Small, impromptu problem-solving conferences and conversations • Teachers using/modeling affective statements ("I feel …") • Teachers asking restorative questions ("How can you make this right? How can you heal the relationship?") • Restorative convenings (and preconference meetings) • Restorative activities to right a wrong and/or repair harm done (including letters of apology, community service, etc.) • Peer mediation (training students to help other students resolve differences)

The Appeal of the Alternative

Proponents of RPs (see, for example, Baliga, 2021; Davis, 2019; Tyler, 2006; Zehr, 2002) argue that RPs can mitigate reliance on exclusionary discipline by addressing the root causes of misbehavior, all while improving school climate and academic engagement. Proponents maintain that while traditional discipline approaches merely manage student behavior, restorative approaches both develop students' social and emotional capacities and nurture school relationships so that students are less likely to misbehave. Proponents further claim that RPs can help students view institutional power as more just, for two reasons. First, RPs invite students to help guide peers through restorative processes, giving the student body a sense of agency and helping students feel their peers care about them. Second, RPs can help students see a clearer connection between the mistakes they sometimes make (e.g., destroying property) and the consequences of those mistakes (e.g., being required to repair that property). In this way, RPs differ from exclusionary discipline, which—theory and research suggest—may lead students to feel school rules are unfair, may fracture student–teacher relationships, may catalyze an attitude of defiance, and may have unintended educational and carceral consequences (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Eyllon et al., 2020; Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019; LiCalsi et al., 2021; Pesta, 2021; Rosenbaum, 2020; Way, 2011).

RPs have also gained popularity as a means of addressing disproportionalities in exclusionary discipline. Psychologists have identified that one cause of racial disparities in exclusionary discipline is that teachers are more likely to perceive an act of misbehavior by a Black student as indicating that the student is a "troublemaker" (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), but enhancing student–teacher relationships can stem this tendency and reduce disparities (Okonofua et al., 2016, 2020). Accordingly, some argue that RPs can address disproportionalities by facilitating positive student–teacher relations regardless of student demographics (see, for example, Gregory et al., 2016). So what does available research say about the effectiveness of these practices in driving positive outcomes for students and schools?

Benefits of Widespread Restorative Practices for Improving Schools

Available quantitative research generally indicates that RPs can reduce schools' reliance on exclusionary discipline, as shown in several randomized control trials (see, for example, Augustine et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2022) and numerous correlational studies (see, for example, Anyon et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2018). Some studies, but not all (Acosta et al., 2019), have demonstrated promise for ameliorating racial disparities in discipline (Augustine et al., 2018; Hashim et al., 2018), improving observed and self-reported student behavior (Duong et al., 2019; McMorris et al., 2013), and enhancing school climate for both staff and students (Jain et al., 2014). Evidence of the effects of RPs on academic outcomes is mixed, and one randomized controlled trial even indicated that implementing restorative programming caused reductions in students' academic achievement (Augustine et al., 2018). Additional rigorous research is needed to identify conditions that support high-quality implementation leading to positive change. (For detailed research reviews, see Darling-Hammond et al. 2020 and Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021.)

When RP programs do not live up to their promise, that may be because of the significant challenges schools and districts face when trying to advance from booking the staff training to seeing staff regularly engage in RPs (see, for example, Gregory & Evans, 2020; Gregory et al., 2021; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). One might assume the former (booking a training) naturally flows into the latter (exposing staff and students to the practices). However, "book-and-hope" approaches do not lead to staff and student exposure to widespread, supported RPs. Yet it is precisely this exposure to RPs that drives outcomes in schools.

Two recent studies offer key insights into why school leaders need to focus on exposure to RPs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021, 2022), beyond initial booking of trainings and workshops.

When students actually *experience* RPs, they see rates of exclusionary discipline decline and academic performance improve. In a multifaceted, statewide study of RPs to date, Darling-Hammond (2022) reviewed data from more than 265,000 California middle school students and measured student reports of school efforts to build community, repair harm, and foster cohesion. The study found that students who saw increases in exposure to RPs also saw marked improvements in academic achievement and declines in out-of-school suspensions. Because these effects were stronger for Black students than for White students, the results suggested that increasing exposure to RPs could ameliorate Black–White disparities in academic achievement and discipline. Darling-Hammond (2022) also reviewed data from 220 California middle schools to ascertain how schoolwide outcomes shifted after schools increased their utilization of RPs. They found that schools that increased their utilization of RPs also saw improvements in school climate and aggregate schoolwide grade point average (GPA) as well as reductions in students' self-reported misbehavior, gang membership, victimization, mental health challenges, and substance use.

Even when schools implement restorative programming, many students do not gain access. Darling-Hammond (2022) reviewed data from more than 300,000 middle school students and found that Black and low-income students had significantly lower levels of exposure to RPs than their peers—even in the same schools.

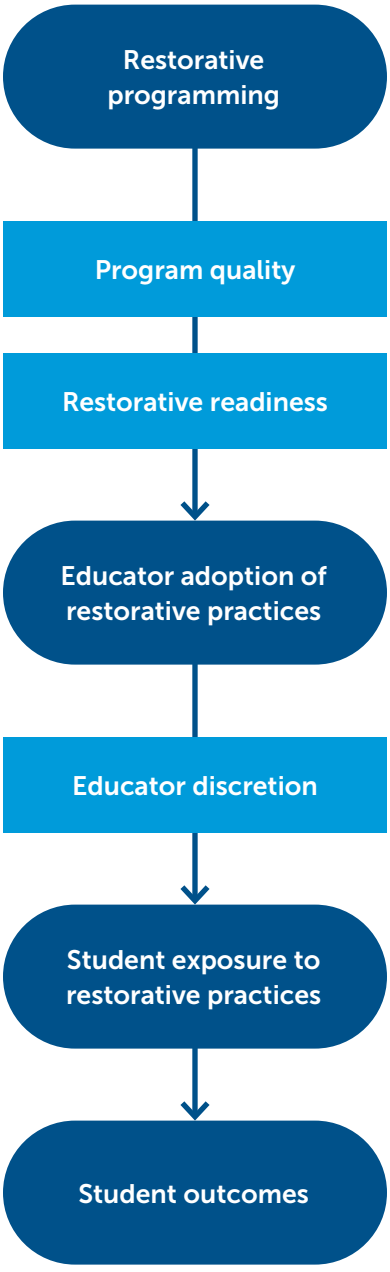
Because programming does not guarantee exposure to practices, and practices are potent, research suggests that districts and schools should invest in strategies to ensure that students of all backgrounds gain exposure to RPs. As we discuss later in this report, one key strategy—perhaps *the* key strategy—for increasing student exposure to RPs is to identify and overcome sticking points in implementing restorative programming. In the next section, we describe common sticking points and explain how data collection can empower targeted efforts to overcome roadblocks and ensure that RPs realize their intended impacts.

Why Restorative Practice Measurement Is Essential to Implementation

Why do so many schools that book RP trainings struggle to increase student exposure to these practices? In social science language, it is largely because the pathway from restorative programming to restorative practice exposure flows through moderators.

As shown in Figure 1, there are at least three moderators (boxes) that determine whether restorative programming results in student exposure to RPs. The first moderator is program quality. Even if teachers are excited to learn RPs, if the training is of poor quality, is not well attended, or lacks coaching and follow-up support, it will not shift teaching practices. The second moderator is restorative readiness. Even if the training is superb and well attended, staff and members of the leadership teams may not be sufficiently receptive to the programming to shift their practices (particularly if they believe exclusionary discipline is necessary to manage student behavior). This notion of the cultural fit between the mores of a school and the ethical pillars of RPs is often described as "restorative readiness," and researchers have theorized that schools that are low on restorative readiness will struggle to make the journey from restorative programming to RPs (see, for example, Garnett et al., 2020; Gregory & Evans, 2020). A third moderator is teacher and administrator discretion regarding when and with whom to employ RPs. Research (Darling-Hammond, 2022; Kang et al., 2009; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Smith et al., 2015) suggests that educators may exercise discretion in ways that encourage them to use RPs when engaging with certain students (e.g., White and wealthy students) but not when engaging with other students (e.g., Black and low-income students). The existence of multiple moderators suggests that schools hoping to parlay restorative programming into student outcomes may face multiple sticking points. And if these schools do not have the means of identifying implementation challenges, they may get held up in a "sticky situation."

Figure 1. The Path From Restorative Programming to Student Outcomes



Restorative Programming Without Implementation Data: Common Sticky Situations

Schools and districts implementing restorative programming often lack the means of collecting implementation data. By *implementation data*, we mean information (e.g., student and teacher surveys) that provides insight into whether the restorative programming is being implemented as intended. Implementation data allow school and district leaders to understand if they are hitting sticking points. Even when school and district leaders have outcome data, when they lack implementation data, they often find themselves in sticky situations: situations with multiple challenges and mounting pressure from all sides.

A common sticky situation schools face when implementing restorative programming is that after implementing their restorative program (e.g., providing training to staff across the school), they find the needle simply is not moving on key outcomes. It could be that nearly every aspect of the restorative programming is functioning as it should, but there is a single sticking point. Perhaps the program quality is high, but teacher attendance at the training was low. Or perhaps attendance was high, but the programming was not of the expected quality. Or perhaps neither quality nor attendance is an issue, but teachers are struggling to shift away from punitive practices. Without data regarding teachers' impressions of the training, their levels of attendance, and their subsequent teaching practices, school leaders may struggle to develop a strategy to navigate through this common sticky situation and may be tempted to abandon a nearly functioning, promising restorative paradigm.

Another sticky situation schools may face is that the needle is moving, but slowly. How can these schools accelerate student exposure to RPs? The key may lie in incentivizing more staff to participate in restorative training and coaching opportunities. Or it may be that teachers are currently using RPs only when engaging with certain students, and empowering teachers to use RPs when engaging with a broader array of students will increase the aggregate effectiveness of restorative programming. Without data on teacher and student experiences, school leaders may find it difficult to determine which approach is more likely to bear fruit.

District leaders also face sticky situations. For instance, following districtwide implementation of restorative programming, the needle moves in certain schools but not in others. In this situation, it could be that teacher participation in restorative trainings is higher at certain school sites. Or it could be that certain schools are implementing both community-building and repair practices while others are implementing conflict-resolution practices only. Or perhaps certain schools have a higher degree of cultural alignment with RPs. Without data on student and teacher experiences, district leaders may struggle to ascertain which sticking point they are encountering.

A final example of a sticky situation a district might face is that the district sees improvement on key outcome measures in the first year after districtwide implementation, but in subsequent years, the district sees backsliding. What explains this shift? It could be that

immediately after the training, teachers were open to using RPs, but in the second year, many teachers abandoned these practices, leading to a negative reaction on the part of students. Or perhaps because of a high degree of teacher turnover, many of the teachers who received training left the district and have been replaced by teachers who have not received training. Without data regarding which teachers are empowered to use these practices and which actually do, district leaders may struggle to determine an appropriate and effective plan of action.

The Power of Implementation Data

Think back to the last sticky situation we described: A district has implemented RPs, and although it saw short-term improvements in key outcomes after Year 1, it now faces backsliding on these same outcomes at the end of Year 2. Let's add a bit more pressure to the situation. Because of the backsliding in key outcomes (including misbehavior and academic performance), the district is facing substantial parental pressure to abandon RPs and use more exclusionary discipline. The district must decide what it will do by the end of the summer, before Year 3 begins.

Now imagine that this district has been taking steps to track program implementation across schools. The district finds, via teacher surveys, that in many schools, teachers had a significantly higher degree of understanding about (and confidence in implementing) RPs in Year 1 than in Year 2. Meanwhile, student surveys in these same schools reveal that whereas students indicated they frequently experienced community-building activities in Year 1, students experienced almost none of these practices in Year 2. The district convenes a brief remote focus group with school leaders and finds that schools with lower levels of RP utilization and exposure recently saw several teachers leave the district, and the new hires have not received restorative training. Based on these data, the district shifts its professional development schedule for all new teachers so that they receive training in RPs during the summer. The district also pairs each new teacher with a veteran teacher to ensure that new teachers have support as they incorporate RPs into their teaching. Year 3 surveys demonstrate that RP utilization and exposure have increased, along with measures of academic engagement and behavior. The district uses this information to allay parental concerns and build political will to sustain its implementation of RPs.

We do not present this thought experiment to suggest that implementation data are a panacea. However, as this example demonstrates, implementation data are a necessary ingredient for developing a targeted strategy for overcoming sticking points (and getting out of sticky situations).

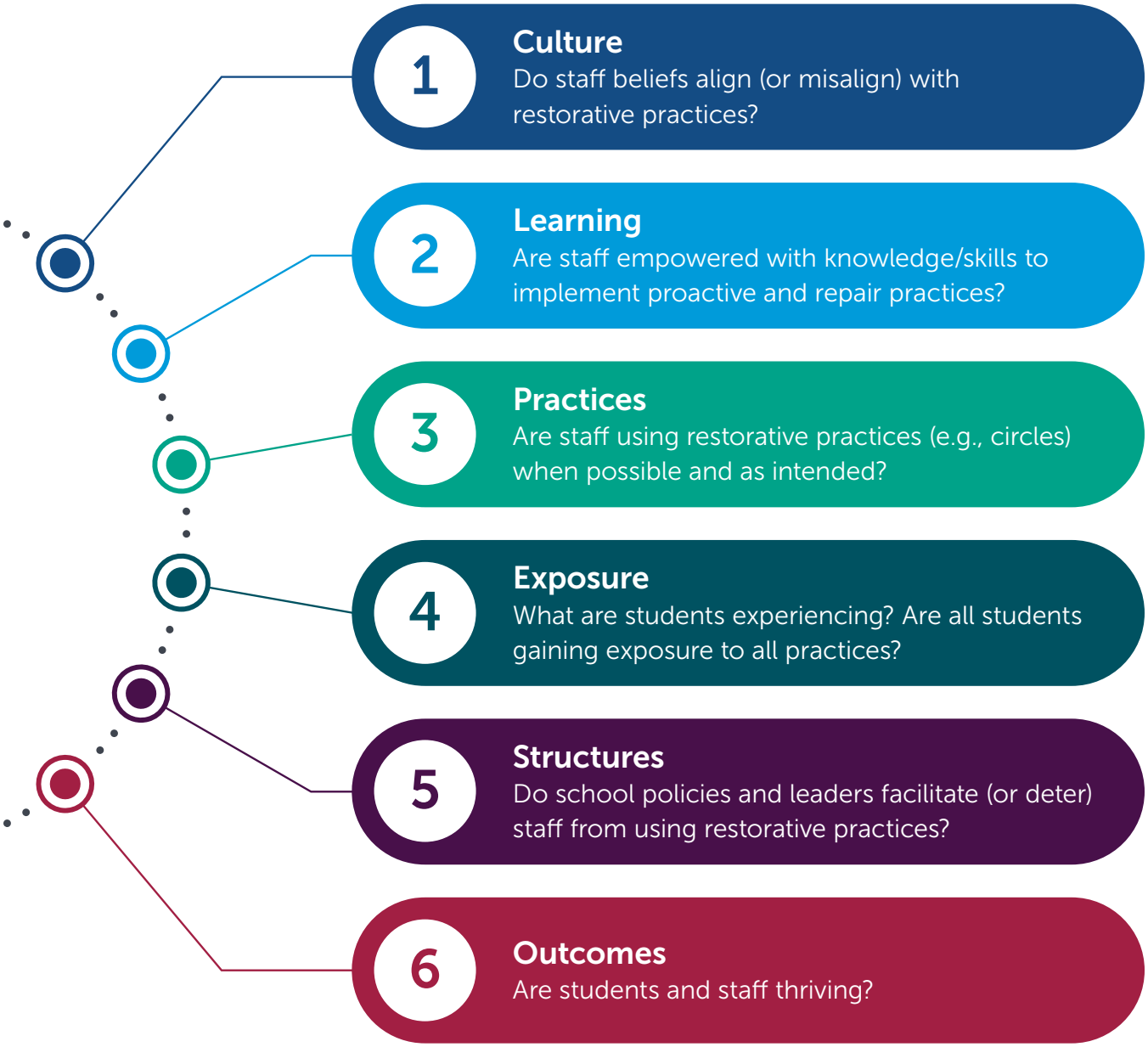
In the following section, we'll discuss the kinds of data school and district leaders can use to traverse sticking points as well as how and when to measure these useful implementation data.

Measuring Restorative Practice Utilization and Exposure: The What, How, and When of Measuring Implementation

What to Measure

As shown in Figure 2, there are six pillars for measuring RP implementation in districts and schools: culture, learning, practices, exposure, structures, and outcomes. Measurement at each level can help districts and schools overcome sticking points.

Figure 2. Pillars for Measuring RP Implementation



Ascertaining when a school's culture is misaligned with a restorative paradigm can cue a school to the need to provide additional professional development regarding the harms of exclusionary discipline and the behavioral benefits of restorative approaches. Reviewing staff learning can help determine when additional training is needed to give staff a clear understanding of how to implement RPs as well as the confidence and skills needed to use RPs. Appraising staff practices can help district and school leaders determine whether staff are using the full range of RPs (e.g., both community-building and conflict-resolution practices) as well as whether staff are implementing practices in a manner that research suggests is more likely to lead to positive outcomes for students. This appraisal process can help district and school leaders ascertain when targeted professional development, coaching, or teacher mentoring might be helpful. Exploring the extent to which students are gaining exposure to RPs can help leaders elevate student groups that are being underserved by current school practices and thus can catalyze efforts to ensure that teachers use RPs when engaging with students of varied backgrounds. Interrogating school structures can provide insight into whether school leaders should rethink school schedules or use of space to ensure that staff can engage in the full range of RPs. Finally, reviewing outcome data can help leaders discover schools and even staff who exemplify both a high degree of RP utilization and impressive outcomes for students; such staff could be approached to provide insight into their practices. Outcome data can also reveal schools and staff who need targeted assistance.

How to Measure

Measuring across six implementation pillars may seem overwhelming. However, district and school leaders can measure important information at each stage via brief, targeted quantitative surveys of students and staff. Google Forms provides a free, easy-to-use interface for developing and fielding surveys. To help school and district leaders begin to use this technology, we have created a Google Form with sample questions across each implementation pillar.

Access the Google Form

Sample questions at each stage are also available in the appendices.

District and school leaders can also use existing data resources to measure student exposure to RPs, staff implementation of these practices, and outcomes for both students and staff (such as student absenteeism or staff turnover).

One existing data system that leaders could leverage is the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). Every year, hundreds of California schools participate in the CHKS. Although the survey focuses primarily on students' health and academic experiences, CHKS includes a school-climate module with questions regarding student exposure to certain RPs. During the 2019–2020 school year, more than 70,000 students in more than 300 schools located in approximately

100 districts participated in the school-climate module. Because districts tend to participate in CHKS biannually, the set of students, schools, and districts that participated in either 2018–2019 or 2019–2020 is even larger. As such, CHKS can be used by many district and school leaders to identify the extent to which students are gaining exposure to RPs.

As indicated in Appendix B, many of the practices reviewed in the CHKS school-climate module fall within the three core types of RPs: community-building practices, repair practices, and measures of school efforts to achieve cohesion across student demographic groups. These CHKS survey items can be scaled to create a measure of students' unique levels of RP exposure (Darling-Hammond, 2022). Although CHKS data do not typically allow individual students to be identified, student surveys within a given school can be averaged to develop a sense of each school's level of RP utilization (Darling-Hammond, 2022). Because schools participate in CHKS with a steady cadence (annually or biannually), these data can also be used to track changes in schools' levels of RP utilization over time. CHKS also provides useful information for identifying schoolwide outcomes related to academic achievement (GPA), attendance/absenteeism, misbehavior, school climate, health, and victimization.

Although CHKS provides some useful information about school outcomes, district leaders will soon be able to develop a deep understanding of the characteristics of each school by using the Cradle-to-Career (C2C) data system. After its launch, the C2C data system will provide school-specific information regarding absentee rates, academic achievement (on a gamut of standardized tests), suspension rates, grade-advancement rates, student course participation (e.g., proportion in AP courses), high school graduation rates, college-and-career indicators scores, student demographics, student-to-teacher ratios, student-to-counselor ratios, and amount of school funding received via the Local Control Funding Formula. These data can be used in conjunction with data tracking RP implementation to identify bright spots, or schools with a high degree of implementation and impressive student outcomes. District leaders can lean on these bright-spot schools to gain insights into how to implement RPs in a way that achieves intended outcomes. C2C data can also be used in conjunction with RP implementation data to identify schools in need of additional targeted assistance (e.g., additional professional development).

Finally, many schools and districts capture administrative data that may be helpful for tracking outcomes for students and staff over time. Like the C2C data, administrative data can be used together with data on RP implementation to ascertain bright spots (e.g., schools, or even classrooms, where RPs are flourishing and students are thriving) as well as targets (schools or even staff) that may benefit from additional assistance. Combining data on RP exposure and student outcomes can also help school leaders identify inequities. For example, a school leader might compare students who received an out-of-school suspension to those who did not and ask questions like: On average, did students who received an out-of-school suspension experience less access to RPs? If so, which practices?

Qualitative data. When resources are available and deeper insights are desired, leaders can field interviews and focus groups with students and staff. These approaches are particularly helpful when leaders hope to discover new approaches that might help them overcome sticking points. For example, a school leader might convene a focus group with teachers to determine the barriers to implementing RPs and probe solutions for overcoming these barriers. They might ask questions like:

- In what ways have you found it easy or hard to conduct community-building circles?
- If you've found it hard, why has it been hard?
- What could the school do to make it easier for you to conduct community-building circles?

When to Measure

The timing and cadence of measurement depend on the pillar being measured.

Culture (or restorative readiness) can be measured before any formal training occurs and can provide insights into whether staff may benefit from any pretraining activities. For example, in some cases school leaders have brought their staff together to discuss the limitations and harms of exclusionary discipline approaches prior to presenting RPs as a promising alternative. They have explicitly discussed values and beliefs about both discipline and student behavior. Conversations are often driven by questions like these: What is the purpose of discipline? What does accountability look like to you? Does your role include helping students learn to manage low-level conflict?

Learning is best measured by tracking how teachers' knowledge and sense of efficacy evolve during the periods directly before and directly after restorative trainings. The goal is to identify whether teachers' knowledge of restorative concepts and teachers' confidence in implementing practices are augmented by the training. It is also worthwhile to ascertain whether staff knowledge and confidence last long after the training has been completed. Staff may forget key concepts from the training, or teacher turnover may lead to a situation where new staff with limited knowledge of restorative concepts have replaced staff who attended trainings and had more knowledge. Identifying either situation can empower school and district leaders to know when it may be helpful to conduct a new training or a refresher course.

Practices are best measured before and after trainings and then at regular intervals to ensure that teachers are using the variety of RPs that can theoretically lead to improvements in school outcomes. Ascertaining the extent to which teachers use RPs before and after trainings can provide insights into the effectiveness of the trainings. Regularly assessing each teacher's level of RP utilization can help identify teachers who may benefit from additional supports (such as coaching).

Exposure, or the extent to which students indicate that their teachers are using RPs, can be measured before and after trainings and then at regular intervals to ensure that not only are teachers using RPs but also students of all backgrounds are gaining exposure to these practices. As with practice data, exposure data can be used to ascertain if trainings are effective at shifting teachers' practices. Exposure data can also be used to determine whether students in certain demographic groups are experiencing more or less exposure to RPs, which empowers targeted strategies to expand access.

Structures are the school practices and paradigms that govern how individuals in a school community engage with one another. Structures include everything from how the physical environment is arranged to how the activities of the day are organized, as well as policies regarding when and how to request administrative help when a student engages in safety-threatening behavior or needs extensive behavioral supports. Although district and school leaders may have substantial control in setting structures, they may not realize the nuanced ways in which existing structural arrangements affect staff and students. Occasional (e.g., biannual) surveys of staff and students that inquire whether existing structural arrangements are conducive to RP implementation (e.g., whether there is adequate space and time to engage in RPs) can help identify sticking points.

Outcomes can be measured at a slower cadence (e.g., annually) to ascertain if RP implementation is having the desired effect. However, leaders should be cautious not to overcorrect when outcome data are reviewed. Changing the culture and practices in a school can take time, and RPs may not realize the intended impacts immediately. Nonetheless, relating information about RP implementation with information about outcomes can help school and district leaders ascertain whether certain practices are essential to realizing desired outcomes, help identify bright spots where implementation is having the intended impacts, or help recognize schools or staff in need of targeted assistance.

Additional Considerations

We close with a handful of additional considerations that may help districts measure practices across various initiatives and programs, optimize existing data systems, and report out on data in ways that instill unity and allay concerns.

Measuring Implementation Across Complementary Initiatives

Many schools and districts implement RPs in conjunction with other programs, such as positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) and social-emotional learning (SEL). Leaders implementing multiple complementary programs face unique challenges when measuring implementation data. We briefly suggest three approaches to overcoming common challenges.

Map it. To measure implementation across complementary initiatives, leaders must first deepen their understanding of the various initiatives in place in their schools. District leaders in particular should investigate whether different schools are implementing different programs or receiving professional development with distinct goals and nuances. Having developed a better understanding of what, in theory, is happening in each school, leaders will be better poised to ascertain any discrepancies between the goals of existing programs and the realities on the ground.

Track smarter, not harder. In this report, we recommend that leaders track data across six pillars of RP implementation: culture, learning, practices, exposure, structures, and outcomes. Many complementary initiatives can be tracked across the same six pillars and in largely the same manner. For example, a leader is planning to implement RPs and SEL. If they are using a preimplementation staff survey to identify the cultural fit between their staff and RPs, they can use the same instrument to ascertain the cultural fit between their staff and SEL. The survey may help ascertain if teachers' attitudes about relationships and punishment are misaligned with the mores of RPs and may also ascertain if teachers' beliefs (or disbeliefs) about students' abilities to grow in their social and emotional capacities are misaligned with SEL. A second example is a principal implementing both RPs and PBIS. Using a survey, they may want to ascertain if students of various backgrounds are being exposed to a variety of restorative approaches. They can use the same survey instrument to evaluate whether students are being exposed to PBIS practices, such as classroom routines, positive classroom expectations, and acknowledgments of expected behaviors. The key point we hope to make here is simply that as leaders develop a means of tracking RP implementation, they should be sensitive to opportunities to track complementary initiatives and programs simultaneously—that is, to track smarter, not harder.

Leverage data to overcome potential tensions. We recommended previously that leaders map complementary initiatives to identify potential sticking points and develop means of measuring whether they are facing or overcoming these sticking points. As leaders map complementary initiatives, we also recommend that they consider tensions: situations where implementing one program as intended could be seen as failing to implement another as intended. One way to identify these potential tension points is first to articulate the theory related to how programs are connected and when school staff should opt to use the practices stemming from each program, and, second, to identify situations where educators may be uncertain which of a series of competing practices they should implement. For example, in a school implementing PBIS, staff may be instructed to develop and communicate a clear system of acknowledgements and awards for positive behavior. The system can inadvertently lead to exclusionary practices. Picture a student who regularly disrupts classroom activities and rarely receives the reward bucks issued by staff for positive behavior. Without the bucks, they cannot join the other students on the anticipated field trip in the fall. It happens again in the spring. If that school is also implementing RPs, teachers may struggle with the tension inherent in being encouraged to practice a rewards system that results in excluding students from community events. What, then, should a teacher in a school implementing RPs and PBIS do to reinforce positive behavior through rewards but also to promote inclusion and belonging?

Providing clarity to educators about expectations in these tension situations can not only improve implementation but also provide clarity regarding how to measure "proper" implementation. Imagine, for example, that teachers systematically track when students are not receiving praise, or bucks, for positive behavior. They notice certain students are rarely receiving bucks and that a disparity of experience is emerging. Upon noticing this, they might intervene to interrupt the pattern by facilitating an inclusive skills-building process. They might (a) facilitate a restorative conversation between students who are not often receiving bucks and their peers who are, (b) encourage students to understand that their behavior is harmful to peers, and (c) provide students with the supports needed to change their behavior. Staff surveys after workshops could probe how teachers feel they have been trained to respond to this precise situation (or similar ones) to gauge the effectiveness of the workshops. Meanwhile, student surveys designed to gauge exposure to RPs and PBIS could ask students how they feel teachers would respond in the situation described above, or simply how they have seen teachers respond to disruptive behavior. Determining whether and how teachers are efficacious in responding to these tension points can help leaders empower staff to overcome the unique sticking points that emerge when tensions arise between largely complementary (and occasionally competing) programming.

Getting the Most Out of Data Systems

Here, we have encouraged school leaders to develop new, low-cost data systems to track and improve implementation of RPs. In our experience though, school and district leaders implementing RPs often already have data systems tracking information that can be used to partially understand RP implementation. We thus recommend that before leaders develop new data systems, they take stock of what they have and ask how existing data could be used to deepen their understanding of any of the six pillars of implementation. We next recommend that leaders ensure that they have taken steps to improve their in-house ability to interpret the data they have. Training staff to use data science approaches to track implementation may reveal unexpected and potent ways to leverage existing data and will almost certainly improve the extent to which leaders can use data captured by any new data systems.

Reporting Out

As leaders track implementation data over time, various stakeholders (parent–teacher association members, caregivers, staff, or even students) may become curious about what the data show. We recommend that leaders prepare for this curiosity, and we suggest two potential approaches.

Report to build political will. Nurturing a restorative community takes time. Some have opined that shifting to a restorative school climate can take as long as 3–5 years (Anfara et al., 2013). Yet while research suggests that RPs may take time to realize their intended impacts, school leaders may face political pressure to abandon RPs if outcome data in the first or second year of implementation do not demonstrate improvement or, worse yet, suggest backsliding on academic or even climate outcomes. School leaders may be better able to maintain the political will needed to sustain implementation if they track short-term and midterm wins in the form of growth on implementation measures. For example, tracking teacher-survey data regarding teachers' cultural beliefs can enable leaders to show that trainings have allowed teachers to become attuned to the relational and emotional needs of students. Meanwhile, tracking student surveys over time can enable leaders to show that students are gaining exposure to practices and evidencing a deeper sense of being respected by and connected to school staff. Finally, tracking a range of outcomes (beyond academic and disciplinary outcomes) can help school leaders demonstrate whether and, if so, how a shift to RPs may benefit the school climate as experienced by students and staff alike. Together, these data may help persuade caregivers and stakeholders that the benefits that can be accrued via the shift to a restorative school are worth the growing pains that may be endured during the journey.

Report restoratively. Although we previously suggested that school leaders use reporting to build political will, we in no way mean to imply that school leaders should report disingenuously or simply with an agenda to persuade. Instead, school leaders may want to follow in the footsteps of some restorative communities that take a restorative approach to reporting. For example, in some schools, staff present data regarding RP implementation to students and caregivers in a circle or convening format. Not only do they discuss what they are finding in student surveys (e.g., "we're seeing that some students are not gaining as much exposure to RPs as others"), but they also provide space for community members to voice their feelings, concerns, and suggestions for how the school community can overcome sticking points and grow. And staff are responsive to this invaluable feedback. Although this approach can be time-consuming, it may help schools both identify innovative means of overcoming sticking points and accelerate the transition to a truly restorative and relational school. To deepen students' sense of agency, schools may also consider empowering students to collect and present data, as appropriate.

Conclusion

As schools across the country continue to implement RPs, they face predictable sticking points. We hope that the guidance in this report—including the link to the sample Google Forms survey and the sample questions in the appendices—will help district and school leaders collect data that can help them overcome sticking points and implement RPs in a manner that empowers students to thrive.

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Appendix A. Questions for Student and Staff Surveys Addressing Each Implementation Pillar

Implementation pillar	Example questions
1. Culture	**Teacher descriptions of their school's cultural beliefs** Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree): • Restorative practices offer acceptable ways to handle student misbehavior. • It would be worth my time and energy to implement restorative practices. • Restorative practices will help me achieve my work goals. • I like the procedures (e.g., restorative conferencing, responsive circles) used in restorative practices. • Use of restorative practices is likely to affect students in positive ways. • Restorative practices would not result in negative side effects for students. • Restorative practices are consistent with my general approach to working with students. • When schools help students develop healthy relationships, student behavior improves. • Exclusionary discipline approaches can harm students and may fail to improve student behavior. • If I implement restorative practices, I will be better at my job.
2. Learning	**Teacher views on RP professional development** Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree): • The training helped me learn about restorative practices. • I feel confident in leading restorative practices in my classroom and/or in my interactions with students. • I feel prepared to run community-building circles. • I feel prepared to run circles that specifically address low-level conflict. • In my school, I know who to go to if I need to refer students for a restorative conference. • I feel I have had sufficient training in restorative practices. • With the training I have had, I am able to integrate restorative practices into my interactions with students.

Implementation pillar	Example questions
3. Practices	**Teacher views on extent of use of RPs** Indicate the frequency with which you use each practice (not at all, rarely, sometimes, often, always): • I ask my students to express their feelings, ideas, and experiences. • When a student misbehaves, I ask them questions about their side of the story. • When a student misbehaves, I have that person talk to those they hurt, and I ask them to make things right. • When a student misbehaves, I have those who were hurt have a say in what needs to happen to make things right. • I use community-building circles as a time for students to share feelings, ideas, and experiences. • I take the thoughts and ideas of students into account when making decisions. How often do you use each of the following restorative practices? (not at all, rarely, sometimes, often, always): • Affective statements • Restorative questions • Small impromptu conferences • Proactive circles/community-building circles • Other community-building events • Activities to honor students' cultural backgrounds and experiences • Responsive circles to address smaller harms/conflicts • Restorative conferences to address more serious harms/conflicts • Conflict coaching to strengthen students' problem-solving skills • Decision-making processes that engage students • Restorative practices with staff • Restorative practices with families

Implementation pillar	Example questions
4. Exposure	**Student feedback on exposure to restorative practices** Indicate the frequency with which your teachers use each practice (not at all, rarely, sometimes, often, always): • My teachers ask students to express their feelings, ideas, and experiences. • When a student misbehaves, my teachers ask students questions about their side of the story. • When a student misbehaves, my teachers have that person talk to those they hurt and ask them to make things right. • When a student misbehaves, my teachers have those who were hurt have a say in what needs to happen to make things right. • My teachers use circles as a time for students to share feelings, ideas, and experiences. • My teachers take students' thoughts and ideas into account when making decisions. • The administration (e.g., principal, vice principal) listens to my side of the story. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree): Teachers help students learn how to: • feel responsible for how they act • understand how others think and feel • care about how others feel • control their own behavior • solve conflicts with one another How often do your teachers use each of the following practices? (not at all, rarely, sometimes, often, always): • Affective statements • Restorative questions • Small impromptu conferences • Proactive circles/community-building circles • Other community-building events • Activities to honor students' cultural backgrounds and experiences • Responsive circles to address smaller harms/conflicts • Restorative conferences to address more serious harms/conflicts • Conflict coaching to strengthen students' problem-solving skills • Decision-making processes that engage students • Restorative practices with staff • Restorative practices with families

Implementation pillar	Example questions
4. Exposure continued	**Student feedback on the *circle* process** Indicate your opinion (four options: No!, no, yes, YES!): • Did you personally care about the topic you discussed? • Was the topic relevant to what you experience outside of school? • Were the people in the circle listening to one another respectfully? • Did you feel that adults respected students' ideas and opinions? • Did you learn something from this circle? • Do you feel the circle helped build positive relationships in the classroom? **Student feedback on the *conference* process** Indicate your opinion (four options: No!, no, yes, YES!): • People heard what I had to say at the conference or circle. • I have a better understanding of why the problem happened and what other people were thinking. • I was treated with respect by the school staff involved. • The plan we agreed to is easy to understand. • I think the plan or agreement will stop the problem from happening again. Circle all that apply: I was here today as (a) person harmed, (b) person who did the harm, (c) supporter of person harmed, (d) supporter of person who did the harm, (e) other role.
5. Structures	**Teacher views on whether school structure supports the use of RP** Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree): • I have access to any resources (e.g., supplies, space) that I need to implement restorative practices in my school. • There is adequate time in the day to implement restorative practices. • Given my workload, the time and effort needed for restorative practices is reasonable. • If I needed assistance and/or advice to help implement restorative practices, I would be able to obtain it. • Restorative practices do not conflict with other interventions or procedures used in my school.
6. Outcomes	(See the main text for examples of outcome data that will be available in the C2C data system. See Appendix B for outcome data currently available in the CHKS data system.)

Note. The survey scales provided are adapted from ones used in prior research; the original scales demonstrated reliability and concurrent validity in prior research (Gregory, A. (2018). *RP-Assess: Quality, quantity, and equity in restorative practices implementation* (Vol. 5) [Unpublished manuscript]. Rutgers University.). The adaptions here require future psychometric testing.

Appendix B. California Healthy Kids Survey Data Questions for Evaluating Restorative Practice Utilization and Outcomes

CHKS items related to restorative practice exposure	
Practice type	**Survey questions**
Community building	1. This school encourages students to feel responsible for how they act. 2. This school encourages students to understand how others think and feel. 3. This school encourages students to care about how others feel. 4. Students are taught that they can control their own behavior.
Repair	5. This school helps students solve conflicts with one another. 6. If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying me, the teacher will do something.
Cohesion	7. Teachers show it is important for students of different races to get along. 8. The adults in this school respect differences in students.

CHKS items related to student outcomes	
Outcome	**Survey questions**
Academic achievement	Student grade point average over last 12 months (self-report)
Attendance	Whether missed school for any reason in the past 30 days
Misbehavior	Whether engaged in acts of misbehavior in the prior 12 months: • fought • destroyed school property • carried a gun to school • carried another weapon to school
School climate	A scale score based on six school climate module responses: • feel like part of school • feel close to people at school • feel happy at school • feel safe at school • feel an adult at school cares • feel an adult at school listens
Health	Whether missed school in last 30 days due to various health challenges: • depressive symptoms • sleep deprivation • illness • substance use

Victimization	Whether experienced various kinds of victimization in the past 12 months:
	• beat up
	• threatened harm
	• threatened or injured with weapon
	• stolen from
	• called names
	• had rumors told about
	• had sexual jokes told about
	• harassed based on
	  • race
	  • religion
	  • gender
	  • orientation
	  • disability
	  • anything else

Author Biographies

Sean Darling-Hammond is a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, with appointments in the Schools of Education and Public Health. He seeks to expand belonging by conducting research to identify K–12 practices that enhance school climates and to elevate social policies that reduce the incidence and impact of racial bias.

Anne Gregory is a professor in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University. She advances research in racial and gender disparities in school discipline and is currently examining school-wide restorative practices and equity-oriented social and emotional learning. Through program development and evaluation, she aims to improve educational settings and reduce differential access to supportive school environments.

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)

Improving education policy and practice and advancing equity through evidence

PACE is an independent, non-partisan research center led by faculty directors at Stanford University, the University of Southern California, the University of California Davis, the University of California Los Angeles, and the University of California Berkeley. Founded in 1983, PACE bridges the gap between research, policy, and practice, working with scholars from California's leading universities and with state and local decision makers to achieve improvement in performance and more equitable outcomes at all levels of California's education system, from early childhood to postsecondary education and training. We do this through:

1. bringing evidence to bear on the most critical issues facing our state;
2. making research evidence accessible; and
3. leveraging partnership and collaboration to drive system improvement.

PACE
Policy Analysis for California Education

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