



12 Indicators of Restorative Practices Implementation:

Checklists for Administrators

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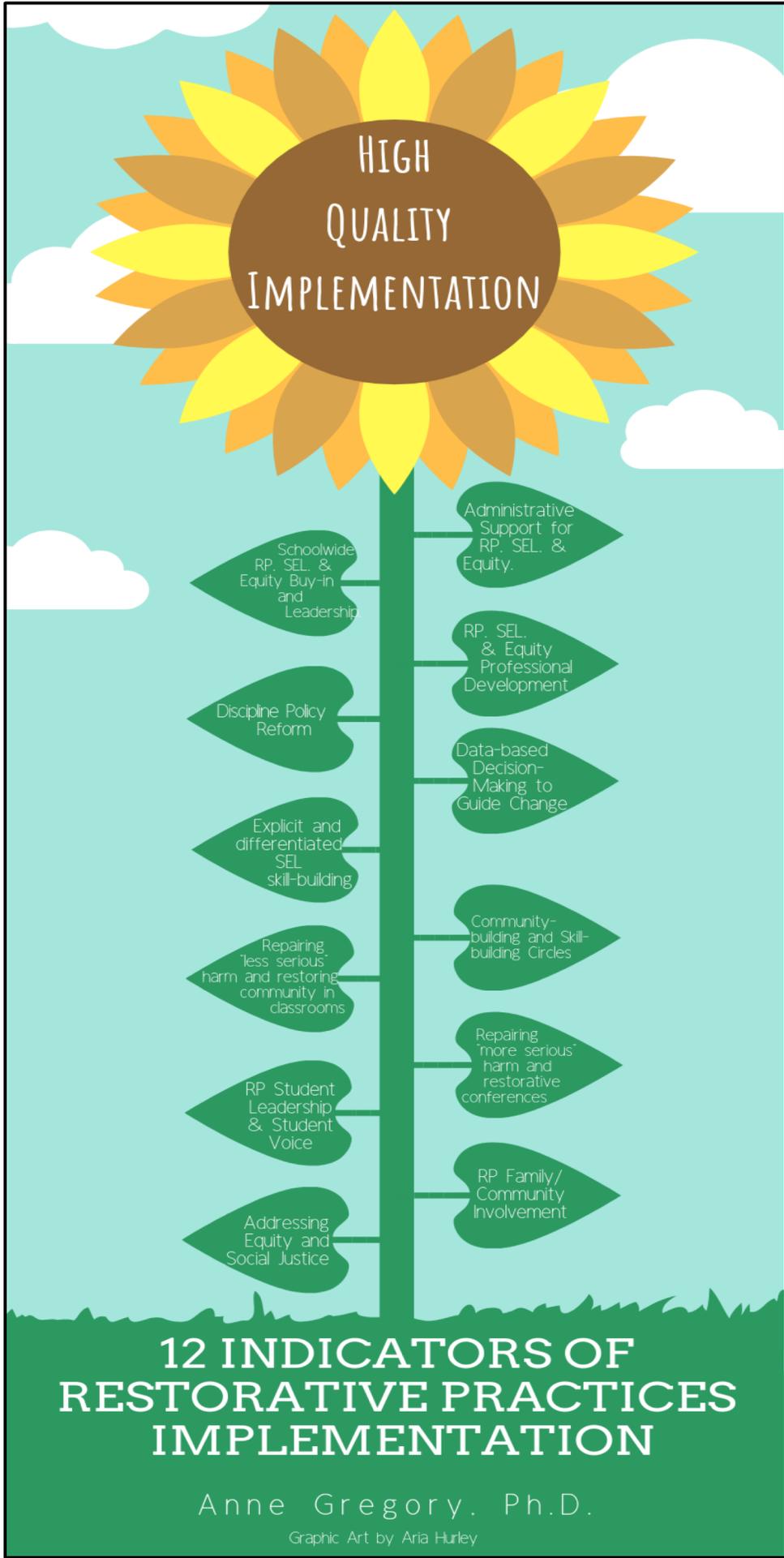
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Introduction

Schools across the country are implementing restorative practices (RP). Based on indigenous traditions, RP in schools require a paradigm shift away from a punitive approach to student behavior and toward a relationship and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) approach. Given gender and racial disparities in discipline, schools also integrate efforts to increase equity.

RP is about building community, addressing conflict, and repairing relationships. It is not a static program relegated to a class period or one adult leader. RP fall along a prevention-intervention continuum. Some practices *prevent* infractions through building community and other practices *intervene* after infractions have occurred.

The challenge of shifting mindsets

When students break the rules or disrupt learning, educators may have an impulse to remove students from class or school. Yet, such exclusion can worsen student trajectories. Given racial disparities in discipline, it can widen achievement gaps.

Administrators are challenged to shift mindsets and to transform policy and practice. Students and staff need support in developing SEL skills. They need time to consider how they can, as a collective, strive for greater equity.

RP implementation requires comprehensive strategic planning

RP implementation can falter under stretched resources and lack of implementation supports. The *12 Indicators of Restorative Practices Implementation* was developed to offer guidance to administrators and their teams. The aim is to help teams understand the scope of implementation supports and to consider RP, SEL, and Equity initiatives in tandem.

The *12 Indicators of Restorative Practices Implementation* come from case studies of four schools shifting their schools toward community-building and restorative approaches to discipline. The *Indicators* were developed through grounded theory analysis of interviews with 18 educators implementing RP. We interviewed nine Principals, seven RP Coordinators, and two RP Principal Coaches. Educators self-identified as 55% female, 45% male, 56% Black or African American, 28% White, and 6% Hispanic. On average, interviewees had over 20 years of experience as educational professionals.

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Administrative Support

Administrative Support for RP, SEL, & Equity

Administrators consistently demonstrate through actions and words that RP, SEL, and Equity initiatives are a priority. They help facilitate implementation through concrete actions.

Administrators:

- ❑ Espouse *and* model an equity, relationship-building, and skill-building approach to student and staff behavior.
- ❑ Make bold leadership decisions to prioritize implementation.
- ❑ Offer concrete logistical and resource support to initiatives.
 - They designate space for restorative interventions;
 - They schedule time for PD, circles, and task force meetings;
 - They allocate appropriate staffing.
- ❑ Create accountability systems to monitor implementation roll out and quality.

Schoolwide Buy-In & Distributed Leadership

Schoolwide Buy-in and Distributed Leadership

A majority of staff demonstrate a collective investment in RP, SEL, and Equity initiatives, with shared leadership advancing implementation.

- ❑ RP, SEL, & Equity initiatives are not isolated “programs.” Relationship-building, skill-building, and equity principles guide everyday practice.
- ❑ Leadership is distributed amongst diverse groups (e.g., students, admin, teachers, staff).
- ❑ A team regularly meets to strategically advance initiatives.
- ❑ Staff have processes in place to collaborate *and* communicate when addressing misconduct in a restorative manner.
- ❑ Use strategies to increase buy-in, such as:
 - Learn by doing: Staff participate in adult circles themselves;
 - Announce small wins with staff;
 - Discuss among staff whether personal or cultural values conflict with initiatives (e.g., norms around power and hierarchy).

Discipline Policy Reform

Discipline Policy Reform

Collective input leads to revised school policies and procedures that reduce the punitive and exclusionary responses to misconduct. Revisions focus on prevention, teaching behavioral expectations and skills, and repairing harm and relationships.

Written school policies and procedures:

- Articulate an RP-oriented mission and vision of the school;
- Focus on prevention and teaching skills;
- Describe repairing harm and being accountable to the community;
- Clarify when teachers address misconduct in classrooms and when they seek support;
- Define procedures for safety, including when a student might be removed from class or school;
- Describe how teachers are informed when their students participate in restorative interventions;
- Offer alternatives for suspension and re-entry circles for returning students.

Data-Based Decision-Making

Data-Based Decision-Making to Guide Change

Monthly, the school leadership team reviews discipline and restorative conference data. The team disaggregates data by student groups to ascertain action steps to increase equity.

- ❑ Analyze disaggregated discipline data regularly for trends and overrepresentation.
- ❑ Develop documentation and follow-up systems for restorative conferences.
- ❑ Present data to diverse groups, including students, for joint analysis and problem-solving.
- ❑ Use data findings to improve school climate and school policies/procedures.

Addressing Equity & Social Justice

Addressing Equity & Social Justice

School staff engage in courageous conversations around race, equity, identity, cultural awareness, implicit bias, and/or systemic injustices. Conversations are not an end point; they are part of a continuous cycle of reflection and action that lead to proactive steps to increase equity in school policy and practices.

- ❑ Explicit focus on equity may include:
 - Increasing student agency and leadership opportunities;
 - Changing policies/practices that have an unfair impact on some student groups;
 - Engaging students and adults in open dialogue about marginalizing institutional practices.

- ❑ Courageous conversations may address:
 - Implicit bias, microaggressions, stereotype threat, racism;
 - Staff's own cultural or racial identity and how it affects interactions;
 - Within school practices or policies that lead to inequity;
 - How systems and structures outside of school affect school inequity (immigration policies, neighborhood gentrification, wealth gap).

Professional Development

RP, SEL, & Equity Professional Development

Teachers, support staff, and administrators receive *continuous* professional development (PD) in the use of RP, SEL, and equitable practices.

- ❑ Professional development is not a “one-off” workshop. PD is ongoing.
- ❑ Training is multi-format: brief workshops, consultation, classroom coaching, full-day.
- ❑ RP coaches build school’s capacity with revised policy/procedures. Coaches are proactive. They minimize “putting out fires.”
- ❑ RP coaches regularly consult with admin on how to use fair process and support adult learning.
- ❑ When possible, security staff receive PD in relationship-building/repairing and de-escalation.

Student Leadership & Voice

RP Student Leadership and Student Voice

Student leaders have opportunities to lead RP, SEL, and Equity initiatives. On a regular and schoolwide basis, student concerns and opinions are solicited.

- Students participate in RP leadership training.
- Student leaders are from diverse groups (e.g., varying achievement, race/gender, extracurricular interests).
- Community-building circles are sometimes led by students.
- Students have regular opportunities to offer feedback on school climate and discipline.
- Student advocacy and agency is nurtured and honored.

Family/Community Involvement

RP Family/Community Involvement

Widespread outreach explains and demonstrates RP to students, their families, and the community at large. Family members participate in a handful of RP activities each school year.

- Tenets of RP are shared via multiple platforms with families and community members.
- Students have opportunities to lead RP activities with families and community members.
- Families have multiple opportunities to participate in circles and to lead RP. Opportunities are inclusive of diverse cultures, languages, and work schedules.
- Families participate in restorative conferences, when appropriate.

Tier 1: SEL Skill-Building

Explicit and differentiated Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skill-building

All students receive explicit instruction in SEL skill-building and have access to additional SEL supports when needed. Staff have opportunities to develop their own SEL skills.

- Students develop SEL skills using sequenced and engaging curricula and activities.
- Adults are *proactive* in identifying student needs for extra support.
- SEL supports are tailored to individuals.
- SEL supports are formal (skill groups) or informal (check-ins about SEL goals).
- Staff develop their own SEL skills through:
 - Regular opportunities for perspective-taking about diverse lived experiences;
 - Identifying emotional triggers during conflict;
 - Raising awareness about how implicit bias impacts decisions;
 - Improving relationship-building skills with students and staff;
 - Participating in adult community-building circles.
- Administrators acknowledge stress on teachers, particularly in regards to balancing initiatives.

Tier 1: Community-Building Circles

Community-Building and Skill-Building Circles

Circles build SEL skills and sense of community between and among students and staff.

Circles challenge traditional hierarchy by honoring all voices equally.

- Circles are widespread, and consistently held (at least once a week for 20 minutes).
- Circles have a low adult to student ratio (1 adult:15 students or fewer).
- Participants discuss relevant topics including those related to power, privilege, and equity.
- High quality circles feel safe, nurture belonging, lift up student voice, and offer opportunities for learning and critical thinking.
- Staff have regular opportunities to be in circle together.

Tier 2: Restoring Community

Repairing “less serious” harm and restoring community in classrooms

Less serious harms are addressed through interventions before students are asked to leave instruction and before punitive sanctions are applied.

- All staff use restorative chats and restorative questions to help students problem solve throughout the school day.
- Responsive circles and mediation address low-level incidents when they occur.
- Teachers intervene in the classroom whenever possible and reach out for support from RP staff/admin for agreed-upon reasons.
- Efforts are made to identify developing conflict and intervene early before it escalates.

Tier 3: Restorative Conferences

Repairing “more serious” harm and restorative conferences

Formal restorative conferences use a problem-solving process that aims to identify needs and actions to restore and repair.

- ❑ A school policy clarifies processes for repairing harm and how responsible parties are held accountable.
- ❑ Restorative interventions are trauma-informed.
- ❑ Restorative conferences include:
 - Voluntary participation of all those affected by incidents;
 - Pre-meetings to orient participants;
 - Restorative questions to reflect on harm done;
 - Problem solving to identify student needs and next steps for making amends;
 - Jointly agreed-upon action plans to build skills or repair harm, when appropriate;
 - Action plans logically link to harm caused or agreements broken;
 - Follow-up to ensure action plans completed and harm repaired.

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Appendices

The appendices include excerpts of interviews that illustrate the challenges and/or strategies school leaders considered while implementing RP. We've selected quotes that reflect *Indicators* 1 (Administrative Support), 2 (Schoolwide Buy-In & Distributed Leadership), 3 (Policy Reform) and 5 (Addressing Equity & Social Justice). Each quote includes a framing question that you can use to foster conversations with teachers, support staff and administrators around the implementation of RP in your school.

Administrative Support

[Restorative Practices] is a philosophy that the school espouses. It's not optional, you can't opt out of it. It's what we do, and we hold teachers and other staff members responsible for fully participating in that philosophy... in terms of holding people accountable, sometimes we have to have individual conversations.

It might involve an email, something to remind people what the responsibilities are, number one around de-escalation, number two around really understanding that we're not in the punishing business, we're not in the policing business, we're not a prison. We are in the education business. There's an expectation that when issues arise, they are handled restoratively.

We also model it for staff. Quite regularly we do staff meetings that are held in the form of restorative circles because at times there's things that staff need to talk about and address in the form of a circle.

-Principal



Framing Question:

What are the ways in which principals do or do not walk the talk?
What gets in the way?

Administrative Support

Story telling is very powerful, and I think principals putting themselves through that process and being able to talk with staff about their own journey is helpful... It goes back to being bold and courageous and, “this is why I believe what I believe” and being able to talk about how did you get to that place.

I think part of that heart-to-heart conversation with staff around this very, very, very challenging racial equity project—I mean this is no joke. This is some deep stuff and long held beliefs. You can go into all of the reasons why, people’s backgrounds, how they were raised, and generational [issues], cultural stuff, these kids, their kids... I think principals need to really think ... how do you create a way of talking to your staff one-on-one and in small groups, as a faculty, as a whole—how do you start to talk to people about [equity and RP]?

-RP Principal Coach



Framing Question:

What are the strengths and limits of personal story telling to confront racial inequality and foster reflection among staff? How else can school leaders be “bold and courageous” in confronting racial inequality?

Schoolwide Buy-In

We were not just equipping [students] as circle leaders, but we were planting a seed. Young people began to be invested beyond circles, and so it turned into a class and they began to learn more than just circle work. They began to learn about social justice issues... and the history and practice of what they were implementing. It went to a deeper level—they became committed to it. They really did take [RP] to the next level, and we saw the power in that. We were like, “Oh we’re out here trying to do change and convince people of this,” when the reality is we realized that students had the most powerful voices in the entire system. No matter what training we could do, people hear from our children.

I think a lot of that student voice came from knowing, and seeing, and recognizing their power and then giving them the tools to exercise it and to use it and speak truth to power. And to also let them know they’re the ones who get to advocate and create the future... We’re not the sole people who are making decisions—and that’s primarily restorative, that is the practice right? To eliminate hierarchy, to say that there’s no “us and you” or “them and us,” but to say that we all have an equal seat in this circle, at this table, and wherever we are.

- RP Coordinator



Framing Question:

Lesson Learned: In the restorative spirit this school sees students as change agents to cultivate schoolwide and community-wide buy-in. Student leaders can be primary drivers for implementing restorative practices.

What are schools/communities doing to take student leadership “to the next level?”

Schoolwide Buy-In

Because some people ...wouldn't sit in a (responsive) circle, some people had this idea that like, "If I sat in this circle and we did this process that when we walked away from it, there's a winner and a loser, and I may be the loser."

And if I'm on the loser end that means that I have a loss of control of power in my position, and in my space, and in my classroom. and more of that is given to the student.

We had to begin to deconstruct that narrative and say, "This is not about wins and losses, but this is about our community." How do we repair and restore and make sure that everybody is okay on both sides? That they're well and they're safe.

-RP Coordinator



Framing Question:

How we can foster buy-in?

How do schools reinforce adult fears of losing control? How do schools enable teachers to share power and enable student autonomy?

Distributed Leadership

We created a teacher leadership position that we call community advocate, which is a person on every grade level who is the direct liaison between the grade team and the dean's office. That person has one period a week that they are scheduled to meet with a dean to help interface around pertinent issues that relate to either individual students or a grade team. [They] problem solve around support initiatives for kids, to make sure students have support circles. [They make sure] grade teams are reaching out with disciplinary issues, and that there are actually clear lines of communication around [discipline].

-Principal



Framing Question:

How have your schools fostered clear lines of communication around discipline?

Distributed Leadership

Every school has so many initiatives and then for whatever reason they fizzle out. I think the first thing has to be not just me buying into it, but the population of the school, the staff, buying into it and seeing the relevance and importance of the program, and how useful it has been... I would say buying in [means] making sure that the staff knows the vision. The vision doesn't live in my head alone, that the entire population, the staff, the students, the parents know about the vision of the program, and ensuring that everybody does their part to make sure that it continues.

For example, at my School Leadership Planning meetings and PTA meetings I talk about RP and the plans that we have for next year. The parents are aware, so when the kids come home and start talking about it, they know what they're talking about. I think it's all of the stakeholders in the school community that need to be aware and know what the vision is and buy into the vision...

I bring [RP] up whenever I can. For example, if I'm having a conference with a parent regarding a student's behavior, I would bring it up. If I'm having a meeting with a group of teachers, whether it's about classroom management or otherwise, I would bring up the strategy of circles. I try my best as much as possible to bring it up in different instances. That it's not really pre-planned, like "we're having a meeting about restorative practices now." No, it just needs to be a natural thing, especially if it's part of the school it should come up naturally and should come up in different conversations you have with teachers, with students, with parents.

-Principal



Framing Question:

This principal is integrating RP. How else can we prevent RP from becoming siloed?

Policy Reform

We have been trying to calibrate the lines between when and why suspension is necessary and also trying to (be) much more intentional around what happens beforehand, what happens afterwards, how we communicate with students about why things like suspensions happen. (We are also) trying to find... *how we can have our staff feel supported when a lot of people are just used to support looking like punishment* for the kid. So, there's a lot of mindset work that we had to do around that.

One of the things we realized is that because restorative practices sounds very different than discipline as a title and because there's a lot of trust that people have in the system that doesn't work- where if you punish a kid, they will come back and learn their lesson... We think it's greater than that. The same thing with a different student and a different teacher requires a different response and we're going to ask questions and not jump to conclusions.

These things are much less transactional and less concrete. The communication became much more important. A lot of the frustration we see, and one of the things we try to address, is making sure that we can clearly communicate, whatever the issue that comes up like who is responding and what are the things that are happening. Just because you don't see it, doesn't mean it hasn't happened. And if you are referring a student about a particular behavior, you also have a responsibility to be involved in helping disentangle it.

-Principal



Framing Question:

Chicken or the egg: What comes first? Mindset shift or policy reform?

Policy Reform

We had strict protocols in regards to when a child can be removed...from a class. Classrooms had to have a de-escalation space in the classroom... it's not a place of punishment, it's a place of, "I can't right now." It's ok, let them do that... And the teachers have to be able to provide for me strategies that they used before they can call me in. I explained to them, "I'm not the one with the power. And if you keep handing it over to me, this child is always going to come back and recognize that I'm in charge. And I'm not. So, in order for me to empower you, you need to start developing strategies that are going to help this child to [remain] in your space of learning."

-Principal



Framing Question:

How can a principal balance the message above
AND a message of support/assistance with discipline?

Addressing Equity & Social Justice

One of things we did was... for two years every Monday there'd be a culturally reflective question in the memo, and the principal would start to reflect and actually write pieces on these questions, kind of model reflecting herself... and we talked about how we can use Wellness Wednesdays one or two times a month to talk more about racial identity, cultural identity, and our own relationship to those issues.

Having those conversations live and having an administrator actively incorporating the culturally reflective questions into the professional learning sessions (facilitated) some cool conversations in light of some of the dysfunctioning. Sometimes that breaks the system open a little bit... and that's really positive.

-RP Site Director



Framing Question:

How might staff reflection on racial and cultural identity shift how they interact with each other and with students?

Addressing Equity & Social Justice

[RP and cultural identity] is complicated and it's nuanced because we can't talk about [cultural] identity without the impact of slavery and colonialism, and how colonialism has had a direct impact on how people understand (punishment)...and an impact on their relationship to punishment. And why and how that is essentially the bedrock of this punitive culture that we live in. If we are going to have an honest conversation about RJ and racial justice we have to talk about why we have such a punitive... culture and how it's very much imbedded into the fabric of how we interact with one another and that being a result of colonialism...

I think there's also a real thing around safety and what it means to have black and brown students and how they should conduct themselves because their lives depend on it and how we don't name that in the everyday, but how that tension exists right under the skin. It manifests in these very punitive policies in a really harsh way of dealing with young people where they have to know their place. And it may be a matter of survival in some cases. In the majority of cases, it's not. But if you have that unspoken understanding then it impacts every decision you make about how young people move.

-RP Coordinator



Framing Question:

This RJ Coordinator suggests we need to challenge a punitive culture based in slavery and colonialism while also being real about the need to prepare black and brown students in how to conduct themselves because their lives depend on it. How do you see those two issues interrelating?