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Program Evaluation of Restorative Practices at One Elementary School

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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Program Evaluation of Restorative Practices at One Elementary School

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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March 19, 2021
Date Approved

Abstract

The rationale for this study was to evaluate the use of restorative practices at One Elementary School. During this evaluation process, I sought to discover the pros and cons of the Restorative Practices program being implemented at this school. Additionally, I sought out responses to my secondary/sub-questions to discover ways that the program's effectiveness could be enhanced. Furthermore, my desire was to discern the effects that the program's implementation had on the schools African American/At-Risk population. The data embedded within this study reflects the results of Restorative Practices program implementation. My findings support the efficacy of Restorative Practices at improving student behavior, attendance rates, and academic outcomes. Therefore, my recommendations support the use of Restorative Practices amongst African American/At-Risk student populations to promote highest student achievement.

Preface

The genesis of my idea to study the use of restorative practices stem from my personal connections as an educational leader and certified restorative practices trainer within my school district. I have trained hundreds of staff and administrators in the use of restorative practices. I have also seen the changes that implementing restorative practices has had on my school as well. My school was a Title I school, with 100% of the student population qualifying for free-and-reduced lunch. Demographically, over 80% of our student population was African American, with over 60% of them being males. We had poor student attendance, low academic outcomes, and referral rates that often-received scrutiny from district leadership.

As the district decided to move towards the use of restorative discipline across the district, I volunteered to become a restorative practices trainer and work towards bringing my newfound knowledge back to our campus. I trained our schools staff with conviction, energy and an overwhelming amount of data that reflected the changes that these strategies could make within our school. However, during the first year of implementation, the most difficult challenge that I faced was gaining teacher buy-in because they had become so use to the punitive disciplinary practices of the past. Hence, teachers were resistant towards initial implementation because they feared that the district would inadvertently embolden student misbehavior and disempower teachers to maintain control over their classrooms. Therefore, my focus went into developing teacher training that highlighted the importance of a growth mindset, data analysis and self-monitoring, understanding the connections between restorative practices and the existing positive behavior systems, and the statistical benefits of forming healthy student/teacher

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relationships. I implemented this approach by modeling restorative disciplinary practices whenever possible; utilizing restorative speak and positive relationship building to gain student compliance regarding school rules. I also made a regular habit of performing more informal classroom observations and normally provided my teachers feedback within 24 hours. These strategies eventually began to sway most teachers to believe in the work of becoming a restorative learning environment. Ultimately, I witness increases in student attendance, decreases in referrals that resulted in suspensions and expulsions; and a dramatic decrease in on-campus student arrests. Therefore, my heart's desire is to see these results duplicated in as many schools as possible.

The most important leadership lessons that I have learned during this process is the value of data-based decision making, leaderships effect on school culture and the importance of effective communication. These leadership lessons are essential aspects of the type of leader that I desire to be. Data was the driving force for every recommendation made within this work. New awareness of how leadership influence the very culture at a school was realized. Lastly, I have increased my understanding of how to communicate to establish change within an organization.

This process contributed to my knowledge of restorative practices, which was an absolute pleasure for me. I have also grown as an educational leader. I have gained a higher level of respect for the challenges encountered by the decision makers of policies, procedures and those responsible for the implementation of new ideas. Especially, when these individuals encounter obstacles that they cannot succumb too, even as their resilience is being tested.

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving wife, Shanay Samuels whose words of encouragement, prayers, and dogged insistence that I never quit lifted my heart, mind, and spirit when I felt like giving up. To my mother Sheree, who also prayed consistently throughout this process, spoke encouraging words to me, and always volunteered a listening ear when my frustrations reached their peak. To my father Calvin, I thank you for instilling within me a love for learning, and an understanding that obtaining a true education would be a life-long pursuit that I should embrace with my mind, body, and spirit to become the best version of myself.

To my four beautiful children, Lamiya, Dashaun, Shyla and Josiah who served many times as unknown motivators; as their very existence reminded me, that they were watching my scholastic example. Therefore, I constantly strived to model the best example of strength, character, intelligence, faith in action and perseverance that I could muster. I also dedicate this dissertation to my church family who have supported me throughout the process. As, your Pastor I love you all, and I am humbled by your belief in me; even when my own visions of completion became clouded with doubt. I dedicate this work and give special thanks to my brothers, Christian and Edwin for being there for me throughout the entire doctorate program. Both of you have been my best cheerleaders. Lastly, I give special thanks to all my National Louis University professors whose guidance, patience, compassion, and dedication never waned as they lovingly cheered me across the finish line.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When school leadership implements a restorative approach towards addressing disciplinary issues, they empower students to take ownership of their educational process and overall development as life-long learners. A growing number of school districts have opted to use restorative practices as a means to strengthen campus communities and reduce the number of student conflicts. These practices have demonstrated effective results in transforming learning environments that have previously been diminished by disciplinary practices disproportionately negatively affecting minority populations.

The school program of concern in my research, called One Elementary School to maintain anonymity, is populated by 85 students, six teachers and two administrators. The school staff is entirely African American and all, but the principal was born locally. The student population is over 80% African American, with 60% of the African American population being males. The entire student population come from poor socioeconomic conditions, which makes 100% of them eligible to receive free or reduced meals which include, breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack. The administrative team at One Elementary School committed themselves to improve the culture of their school community by using restorative practices as a means to decrease the number of suspensions and decrease incidents requiring law enforcement notification due to a child losing control and who is a danger to themselves or staff. According to Simson (2014), African American and other minority subgroup students are more likely to dropout and experience incidents with law enforcement due to the rigidness of punitive discipline practices. The subject of this evaluation finds itself in a precarious situation, as its

minority students continue to demonstrate the lowest academic outcomes; but are the recipients of the highest rates of school disciplinary actions. For this reason, One Elementary School has adopted restorative practices in the form of progressive discipline to address the issues such as these. Reeves (2009), asserts that by enhancing the cultural environment of a school is best reflected in the actional steps that leaders take to orchestrate change, verses a more traditional approach that focuses on announcements, lectures, and warnings. What initiating the restorative practices model demonstrates, is the leadership team's decision to move with intentionality; with the purpose of ending obsolete disciplinary practices that do more harm than good to students.

Purpose of the Program Evaluation

I have evaluated the use of the restorative practices program at One Elementary School to determine whether the program is effective at improving student learning, attendance and in school behavior. One Elementary School recently implemented the restorative practices program as a deliberate means of cultivating students' connectedness to education and their achievement, as well as promoting meaningful family engagement throughout their children's educational process. Due to the newness of implementation, my research adds to existing data by evaluating the effectiveness of restorative practices amongst African American students. Thus, this research into the efficacy of restorative practices as a means of creating a school culture that promotes positive relationships and increases student achievement, provides important findings for informing leadership decisions by the school district administration and leadership members of One Elementary School.

I became aware of the restorative practices program through my relationship with the school's founder. During a casual exchange of thoughts regarding the current state of education, I shared that I had become a restorative practices trainer for my school district. Upon hearing this, he shared that his school ironically had also begun the process of implementing a restorative practices program due to the out-of-control student behaviors that had begun to overwhelm staff, decrease overall attendance rates and severely hinder their academic success. Therefore, I inquired about the possibility of collaboratively working together to address these issues and he agreed.

My program evaluation is related to student learning by addressing the issues within the learning environment that have hampered past student achievement. A restorative practices "approach proposes new foci for wellness in the learning community" (Mullet, 2014, p. 158). It is my belief that students learn better in a positive atmosphere where they are valued members of that learning community. Hence, my desire was to demonstrate the constructive changes that restorative practices have had on altering the learning environment for the betterment of all students.

The purpose of the evaluation is to highlight the effectiveness that restorative practices have on the learning environment. Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2009), sheds light on the effectiveness that restorative practices proactively have on reducing incidents of student misbehavior. As, previous suspension rates where high at One Elementary School, reducing recidivism rates is of great importance because students are losing valuable instructional time.

Rationale

The rationale for my program evaluation is to provide descriptive research to help

educators understand the potential attached to the use of restorative practices amongst

African American students within the public-school system. The subject of my evaluation

possesses community demographics which include a high-risk, African American

population with academic challenges, and social concerns like other schools that have

implemented restorative practices and experienced positive behavioral, social, and

academic outcomes. My intent is to study whether there is a direct correlation between

the use of restorative practices in the form of progressive discipline and the behavior,

social and academic growth among students at One Elementary School after three years

of implementation.

     This research contributes to the knowledge and use of restorative practices in

education, application enhancement, and policy information in public education.

Roland, Rideout, Salinitri, and Frey (2012) emphasized the need for learning

environments to be structured around inclusivity if student success is to be achieved.

Thus, it is incumbent upon school leaders to embrace practices designed to create "a

culture of excellence, high expectations, encouraging life-long learning of all members in

the school community" (Thornsborne & Blood, 2013, p. 113). Therefore, methodical

research must continue in the arena of how restorative practices can benefit the

educational landscape as "studies suggest that zero tolerance policies neither improve

school climate by disruptive students nor reduce rates of misbehavior through a deterrent

function. In fact, these punitive policies might be counterproductive" (Simson, 2014, p.

517).

     I selected the restorative practices program at One Elementary School, which is a

private/ faith-based educational institution, because my former school district prohibited

me from studying their use of restorative practices at schools. Hence, I sought to find a comparable school community with similar student demographics, attendance, and academic performance issues that was also implementing restorative practices and was interested in analyzing their program to increase its effectiveness.

The critical issues at One Elementary School are poor student behavior, irregular student attendance, and inadequate academic outcomes. Ingraham et al. (2016) shares that during the 3rd and 4th grade of elementary, we begin to see gaps in school outcomes amongst minority youth that come from poor socioeconomic environments versus other subgroups. Reasoning such as this, provoked the school's administrative team to adopt a new approach towards addressing school discipline and community building to counteract these issues. This is important to my community stakeholders due to the growing number of students that have become entangled with the juvenile justice system. According to Mallet (2016), students punished through punitive disciplinary policies often become first-time offenders. These students are put at higher risk of undergoing suspensions, expulsions and infractions leading to law enforcement involvement.

Goals

The goal of my evaluation is to study the relationship between the use of restorative practices and the reshaping of disciplinary approaches that create a healthy school community, focused on student success with African American Students. According to Costello et al. (2009), restorative practices ideology and techniques have garnered positive results on a global scale. Therefore, further evaluation of the use of restorative practices is necessary, to understand the viability of its use in producing favorable school climate outcomes behaviorally and academically. Shrinking and then

eventually eliminating the achievement gap between African American students and other sub-groups is paramount. Therefore, there is a need to build healthier schools, where climate and educational focus is at the forefront of all future district and school level planning. Wagner and Kegan (2006) assert that leaders must seek to identify any actions taken that are undermining our obligations is a key in developing lasting change. The punitive disciplinary practices of the past have proven to be unequitable, harmful, and detrimental to the overarching mission of improving the academic and social emotional well-being of all students. "At-risk students already have challenges in their daily academic efforts. Becoming targets of indiscriminate policies only complicates these young people's lives" (Mallet, 2016, p. 298). Thus, my every intention is to highlight the evidence-based suggestions found within the restorative practices framework as a resource for other school districts to remediate their schools that mimic similar hinderances towards student success. Mallet (2016) goes on to share that restorative practices not only reduces problematic student behavior, but it also improves academic outcomes. My professional analysis of Mallet's sentiments is that the improvement of student learning is a biproduct of the needs of the whole child. This "whole child" concept broadens the scope of educators by pushing us to realize that education is much more than teaching curriculum. "Students need schools and communities that offer protective factors to support their resilience, heal the harm, develop and restore their confidence in themselves and their communities" (Ingraham et al., 2016, p. 355).

Definition of Terms

In this section, I will define educational jargon or acronyms found within my dissertation. Clearly defining these key terms assists reader understanding of the overall body of this work. The four primary specialized terms referred to throughout my research include restorative practices, the McKay Scholarship, 504 Plan, and Individual Education Plan (IEP). I elaborate on the meaning of these terms within the body of my paper, but a brief definition of each of these terms are as follows:

1. Restorative Practices - Restorative practices have a defined mission and purpose to engage the whole learner, by catering to their academic and social emotional needs. This is accomplished through an enhanced concentration on the development of school community, through equitable practices that encourage empathy and relationship building between students, families, school staff and stakeholders.

2. McKay Scholarship - According to the Florida Department of Education (2021), the Florida McKay Scholarship is a scholarship that allows a parent of a student with disabilities to choose what they feel is the best private or public educational setting for their child.

3. 504 Plan - According to the Florida Department of Education (2021), Section 504 is a law that prohibits schools from providing students who have disabilities from receiving the same educational programs, activities, or services as their nondisabled peers, and it ensures them a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

4. Individual Education Plan (IEP) - According to the Florida Department of

Education (2021), an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a composed plan to meet

the educational needs of a student with a disability.

Research Questions

My research questions are an essential guide for my dissertation. Answering my

research questions involved data collection, analysis, and interpretation. My aim was to

pinpoint the measurable benefits that the use of restorative practices brought to One

Elementary School. Furthermore, I sought to understand what obstacles existed that

hindered the program's successful implementation, and how those hinderances might be

removed. The primary exploratory questions driving my research included:

1. What do the teachers and administrative staff report is working well with the

   restorative practices program at One Elementary School?

2. What do the teachers and administrative staff report is not working well in the

   restorative practices program at One Elementary School?

My secondary/sub-questions included:

1. What types of professional development do teachers perceive they need to

   better implement this program?

2. What changes, if any, have teachers observed in their academic and behavior

   data among the African American population?

Challenges

My original intent was to do my program evaluation on the use of restorative

practices at a Title I elementary school within my district. However, after submitting the

required paperwork to gain approval to conduct research within my district, my request

was rejected. I was advised by district leadership that because of the current state and federal scrutiny that the district was under, I would be prohibited for fear of exacerbating the existing negative perceptions of the school that I desired to research. I earnestly desired to study the use of restorative practices, despite my disappointment in my districts decision to deny my request, so I diligently began to seek out private schools that mirrored some of the main issues that I have witnessed the use of restorative practices address, such as student behavior and poor academic outcome's. It was during a casual conversation with the founder of One Elementary School that the desired focus for my research connected with the school's current shift to adopting the use of restorative practices to usher in radical changes within their school.

Additionally, an even greater challenge loomed on the horizon for me while engaging in the beginning stages of this study. The challenge would come in the form of COVID-19, otherwise known as the Coronavirus. This virus led to a global pandemic, as people from all walks of life perished after being infected by this unseen enemy. The Coronavirus would change the way that all mankind interacted with one another, as wearing a facemask, and washing our hands in hypervigilant fashion have become social norms. The closures of schools during the pandemic became absolutely necessary to save the lives of millions of American, students, teachers and other school personnel. Changes like these altered the means used for communication and social interaction. Therefore, I was compelled to use technology to complete this evaluation. To accommodate the school administrators and teachers, I facilitated virtual meetings, held teleconferences, and sent and received emails to avoid possible physical that could risk COVID-19 infection. This was a particularly daunting portion of the data collection process because

of frequent delays in responses from staff. Thankfully, the administrators consistently helped to bridge any gaps in the communication of information.

Conclusion

Evaluative studies conducted within multiple schools suggest that restorative practices aid in the reduction of disciplinary issues and encourage the development of healthier academic environments. Primarily, this goal is accomplished through the mending of fractured relationships between students and school staff. It is believed that students who feel safe within their school communities obtain higher levels of achievement. Therefore, if educational leaders desire the positive results that restorative practices have demonstrated within multiple academic and juvenile justice settings; they must be willing to detour from the pervasive punitive practices that are poisoning the educational environment and spoiling our hopes of seeing all students reach their greatest academic potential.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The purpose of my literature review is to examine what others have said about restorative practices and to synthesize the research to build a justification as to why the use of restorative practices is important to student learning. My intent is to adequately employ the abstracted concepts, opinions, and methodologies of professionals that have utilized restorative practices, as a means of addressing a myriad of issues commonly found within public schools. As Brooks has articulated so wisely,

> We have a long tradition in this country of looking to schools to solve our social
>
> problems, including and especially poverty. Although this strategy clearly has not
>
> worked, and arguably cannot, schools do have a critical role to play. (2007, p. 11)

Addressing the socioemotional needs of students becomes relevant when we consider that by addressing those needs, the minds of students can be cleared to concentrate on academic pursuits. The necessity for schools to play a critical role as societal change agents is shifting the solely operational leadership focus; to one that considers the psychosocial needs of students, to create a more inclusive and productive learning environment altogether. Rost (1993) describes leadership as basically doing what is right to achieve excellence. Hence, the use of restorative practices within our schools facilitates this paradigm shift.

Traditional Disciplinary Practices

The need for schools to move away from outdated, and largely unsuccessful discipline practices, is as urgent as the need to respond to a forest fire nearing a residential community. What causes mankind to respond so vigorously to this type of

blaze? The logical response outside of property damage, is the looming potential that lives could be lost. Mullet (2014) states that of the millions of students enrolled within public schools, approximately 130,000 had been expelled. Additionally, over 2-million students that were under the age of 18 were arrested at schools with punitive disciplinary policies, with 1.3 million of these students being charged with criminal offenses (Mullet, 2014). Therefore, when statistics continue to demonstrate direct correlations between the punitive discipline approaches still practiced in many schools, and the prison systems methods of dealing with inmates, school leaders must respond with a sense of urgency that saves the futures of students that are being shaped to become the future inmates that can tear a community apart.

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices program can be used as the water necessary to extinguish the flames that are trying to burn away our students' innocence. According to Stewart-Kline (2016), punitive disciplinary measures perpetuate adversarial attitudes between school staff and students, increases recidivism rates, and often leads to rises in incarcerations. Stewart-Kline (2016) further states that restorative practices can be utilized to promote inclusivity, student engagement and positive relationship building between students and staff; so that ultimately, staff can then focus on bridging, and eventually closing any gaps in student achievement. Ultimately, what these sentiments reflect is that when students and teachers work collaboratively together, their combined efforts produce results. This goes outside the boundaries of teachers being great lectures, to actualizing students as being co-thinkers and co-authors of the learning experiences that take place within our classrooms.

The achievement gap continues to broaden as a disproportionate number of African American and Latino students remain the highest recipients of punitive discipline policies that ultimately limit the amount of academic instruction that can be received due to detentions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. A recent longitudinal study conducted within the Texas public school system reflected that "African American students (26.2%) were more likely to receive out-of-school suspension in response to a first infraction compared with Latinos (18%) and Whites (9.9%)" (Gregory et al., 2016, p. 326).

According to research presented in an article written by Ingraham et al. (2016), after using restorative practices within an elementary school setting for approximately 3 years, the school experienced an 85% reduction in behavior referrals and a significant increase in community engagement as parents expressed a 20% decrease in negative responses on a satisfaction survey (p. 376). Therefore, the use of restorative practices has the propensity to positively affect the entire learning community.

Simson (2014) proposes that schools that rely heavily on zero tolerance policies produce school climates that do not hinder student misbehavior; and are in fact, counterproductive at reducing the number of referrals that led to both in-school and out-of-school suspensions or expulsions (p. 517). However, while counterproductivity may result from these methods, suspensions continue to be a broadly utilized method of handling school discipline; despite the scarcity of evidence that this method prevents future misbehavior from the students who commit the infractions. Additionally, Payne & Welch (2010), asserts that zero tolerance policies are increasing the frequency of law enforcement interventions being required to resolve situations that were at one time,

handled at the school level. Thus, school officials loose relational leverage with the students that they serve; and law enforcement unintentionally become viewed as school disciplinarians (p. 1022).

Despite the continued use of punitive practices, many school boards and stakeholders have called for even narrower disciplinary measures, relegating many school leaders to be stricter school managers. Therefore, they may feel that choosing the restorative practices approach towards dealing with school discipline, may not be a palatable option. Glanz (2006), suggests that school leaders' effectiveness is predicated on their ability to demonstrate a broaden approach to leadership; and while managing the learning environment is key, operational leadership cannot become the only key used to unlock students' and teachers' greater potential (p. 2).

Punitive Disciplines Impact on Minority Students

Through my research, I discovered that many educators find themselves at a relative crossroad; as they continue to ponder ways of holding students accountable for violating school rules and regulations, the answers have not been clear about how to do that without maintaining a punitive disciplinary approach. Punitive discipline, while affirming the need for clear concrete responses to address negative student behaviors, have simultaneously nurtured an insidious undercurrent of racial discrimination that has plagued multiple culturally diverse academic settings. The punitive "approach to school discipline, the considerable overrepresentation of Black students receiving punitive consequences to problem behavior is of particular concern. Research clearly documents that Black students experience more intense punishment than White students" (Payne & Welch, 2010, p. 1022). So, despite opposition, restorative practices must continue to be

researched to determine if success in addressing this issue is occurring, because the current data trends of disproportionate discipline should be looked upon as unacceptable by any ethical school leader. Kotter (2012) insinuates that good leadership demands the type of boldness that inspires change (p. 45). Fortunately, school leaders can maximize their potential of achieving success, by always doing what is in the best interest of students. Thus, my goal is to increase the likelihood of American schools adopting restorative practices as a means of appropriately addressing school discipline, dramatically reducing recidivism rates, and creating school climates that where all learners can succeed.

This evaluation applies the knowledge and expertise of similar studies regarding restorative practices and the theoretical framework that validates its effectiveness. Ingraham et al. (2016) claim that restorative practices can be defined as the development of holistic relationship building that engages the innermost parts of the heart and mind, necessary for the creation of an empathetic response towards student discipline (p. 356). Restorative practice stresses the development of communication and relationship building skills that create a positive school climate, heals harm, and builds empathy amongst all parties (p. 356). Restorative practices propose methods to escape the cycle of detriment in school discipline.

Mullet defines misbehavior as "harm inflicted on the well-being of others, whether mentally, emotionally or physically, this harm places the school community at-risk" (2014, p. 158). Hence, the goal of restorative practices is to repair the injury to the school community, while holding the individual that committed the injury, accountable. Several progressive discipline approaches pursue beneficial outcomes: impeding

misbehavior, teaching improved responses, and prompting healthier decisions in the future. A restorative practices approach focuses on improving the wellness of the entire school community.

Understanding the Need

The use of restorative discipline practices amongst educators has become an increasingly popular means of dramatically improving classroom behaviors. Teachers can quell conflicts, whereas in the past, addressing unsavory student behaviors was likely to result in a disciplinary referral being issued:

> A recent longitudinal study followed students in the Texas public school system. African American students (26.2%) were more likely to receive out-of-school suspension to a first infraction compared with Latinos (18%) and White (9.9%). This disparity held when accounting for other risk factors. (Gregory et al., 2016, p. 326)

This implies that schools seriously need to rethink their current disciplinary practices. Roland, et al. (2012), emphasized the need for learning environments being structured around inclusivity if student success is to be achieved (p. 436). Now, let me clearly state that restorative practices promote accountability when harm is done by a student. However, it utilizes an approach that is less truculent in its focus, straddling the fence between correction and care. If schools desire to effectively deal with the issues associated with current disciplinary practices, school leaders should focus on creating "a culture of excellence, high expectations, encourage life-long learning of all members in the school community" (Thornsborne & Blood, 2013, p. 113).

Implementing the Plan

Improving the way our schools handle discipline must begin with a sound strategy for implementing these approaches. Wagner and Kegan (2006) express the idea that without having a well-defined and cohesive set of stratagems for refining learning, school leadership cannot evolve from being anything other than reactive in their approach towards effectively dealing with issues such as school discipline. Restorative practices shift the reactive focus of school leaders, challenging them to truly *see* the students that they serve. This *seeing* of students describes a willingness to look beyond race, socioeconomics, systematic injustices, and a plethora of other things that have hung a dark proverbial cloud over the heads of some of our students being as successful as others. According to Reeves (2009), change should always be meaningful and exciting to produce success.

Restorative Practices programs require a continuous commitment to conversation and regard for difference. One of the mainstays of restorative practices is professional development, practical implementation process and monitoring. Kaveney and Drewery (2011) strongly support the evolution of prior professional development practices in which the entire focus needs to be the practical application of skills necessary for the improvement of effective communication and finding collaborative solutions to stave off the intrinsic residue shed form the more punitive measures of school discipline. Thus, leaders must use professional development opportunities to support and reinforce effective program implementation.

School staff are asked to consider how they speak to students, practicing mindfulness and patience to model healthy communication for their students. Training

teaches several communication techniques, including body language, to develop understanding amidst conflict. These communication techniques focus on the use of: "avoiding totalizing language and using externalizing language and using externalizing language where the issue or problem being addressed is viewed as external to the person" (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011, p. 6). One shared feature found in restorative practices is that class meetings are held in a circle. On a philosophical level, circular meetings, was a common practice amongst multiple indigenous cultures. Additionally, a circular meeting enables participants to hear and see each other; gives students and staff members voice to discourage misunderstanding. Strengthened communication lends room for greater levels of understanding that can break down the barriers of cultural ignorance. Cultural ignorance perpetuates the racial biases that foster disproportionate discipline practices amongst all subgroups. According to Simson (2014), social psychologist suggests that cultural biases motivate the perceivers reactions. As a result, these reactions color the response of everyone tied to the disciplinary process, leaving the students at the mercy of the culturally ignorant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through my research I will help demonstrate that restorative practices are a viable alternative to the current disciplinary practices within today's schools. The abstracted concepts, opinions and methodologies associated with restorative practices stand to revolutionize school disciplinary approaches, especially amongst our African American populations. Fronius et al. (2016) report an 84% decline in out-of-school suspensions in at a Texas middle school, a 77% decline in referrals in an Oakland, California Middle School, a 52% drop in violent infractions in a struggling West

Philadelphia high school and a 60% increase in graduation rates at a struggling High

School in Minnesota after implementing restorative practices for 1-3 years. Thus, it is

incumbent upon me, to add credence to the value of restorative practices, so that

oppositional voices may optimistically change their perspective as the current state of

disproportionate discipline is unacceptable. As educators, we must dare to teach outside

of our boarders. We must challenge the status quo, because it is our duty as professionals

that have chosen this helping profession. Ingraham et al. (2016), demonstrated an 85%

reduction in behavior referrals and a significant increase in community engagement after

using restorative practices. Kaveney and Drewery (2011), attest to the fact that key

communication techniques, such as having restorative meetings within the learning

environment encouraged student to critically think about their actions to avoid harm (p.

10). Therefore, the use of Restorative Practices programming has the propensity to

positively affect the entire learning community.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Research Design

The program evaluation approach that I used is an implementation evaluation. This approach allows me the opportunity to critically examine the implementation and use of restorative practices at One Elementary School during the 2018-2019 school year. I gathered and analyzed various school level data and surveys to determine the overall effectiveness of the program, or lack thereof. Implementation evaluation requires:

> Finding out what actually happens in the program by answering several key questions. What are its key characteristics? Who is participating? What does staff do? What is working and not working? Answering such questions is essential because implementation problems are a common cause of program failure. (Patton, 2008, p. 308-309).

This methodological approach is best suited for the collection and aggregation of One Elementary School's data; with the anticipated goal of supporting my theory that the restorative practices program is a more effective approach toward equitably handling school discipline especially amongst non-Caucasian students.

Participants

The key participants that I gathered data from at One Elementary School included: Data Management Technician (DMT); Teachers who taught grades 3-5, ranging from 3-9 years of teaching experience; the Dean of Discipline who has been in education for 7 years; and the school's Principal who has been in education for 9 years. These individuals were chosen because my research focus was to discern what effect the

use of restorative practices had on the reading and mathematics proficiency rating of the students. The academic performance data was obtained within 3rd – 5th grade students, so the teachers of this subgroup were the targeted because these grade levels participate in mid-year and end-of-course examinations. The data from grades K-2 was more subjective due to portfolio checks being their primary measurement tool for rating student academic performance.

These individuals actively participated in school mandated training in the use of restorative practices and the eventual implementation process of these restorative practices at One Elementary School during the 2017 through the 2020 school year. According to Patton (2008), it is essential to identify the scope of how a program realizes envisioned outcomes and achieves participant needs (p. 310). Ultimately, by tapping into these sources of valuable information and insight into the program, I was able to conduct a thorough evaluation of the data and provide recommendations for program improvement.

Data Gathering Techniques

The types of data that I gathered consist of discipline, attendance, test scores and survey. This data is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. I engaged the staff and administrators at One Elementary School during a regularly scheduled staff meeting prior to the beginning of the school day to solicit voluntary participation in a survey. The staff members that accept the invitation to participate have received, read and signed an informed consent adult participation form. I have disseminated the survey to all participants by email later, with the hopes of getting a minimum of 50% of the teachers and 100% of the administrators to participate. In addition, with administrations' approval,

I collected the discipline, attendance and test score data of the 2017 through the 2020 school years. This was done for the purpose of comparative analysis of the data prior to, and after the restorative practices program had been implemented beginning during the second half of the 2017-2018 school year.

Survey

I have surveyed the two administrators and six teachers that participated in the implementation of restorative practices in the form of progressive discipline during the 2017 through the 2020 school years at One Elementary School. The ages of the teachers are between 21 and 60; while the ages of the administrators are between 31 and 60. No parents or students were surveyed. Permission to conduct the survey was obtained from the school level administrators. Next, a date and time to participate in the survey was established. By signing the consent form, teachers, and administrators indicated that they understand the purpose of the study and agreed to participate in a brief on-line survey that was sent via e-mail. All participants were advised that their participation is voluntary, and that they may discontinue participation at any time with no negative consequences. Upon approval, I surveyed all teachers and administrators at One Elementary School, regarding the use of restorative practices during the 2017 through the 2020 school year.

Pre/Post Restorative Practices Data

Specifically, I analyzed the discipline referral and suspension data, attendance percentage rates and academic performance measures of all students during the 2017 through the 2019 school year and use comparative analysis to determine how the use of restorative practices impacted the learning environment. The students at One Elementary School do not participate in statewide testing. However, grades three to five, do

participate in mid-term and end-of-course examinations. Hence, this data was utilized to discern what effect the use of restorative practices had on the reading and mathematics proficiency ratings of the students.

Data Analysis Techniques

The initial phase of me analyzing the collected data focused on arranging the raw information into something more comprehensible. This made it easier to recognize repetitions or associative connections. I sought to pinpoint the research questions that can be resolved within the collected data. Through the careful analysis of both the qualitative survey data and quantitative test score, discipline, and attendance data, my intent was to demonstrate any direct correlations between the restorative practices program being instituted at One Elementary School and changes in student behavior, attendance, and academics amongst their African American population.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study did not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. Participation was also completely voluntary, to avoid any comfortability issues. While participants did not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of restorative practices and what changes, if any, need to be made.

I asked administrators and teachers at a regularly scheduled staff meeting, if they would participate in a brief survey regarding the use of restorative practices at One Elementary School; upon agreeance, I hand delivered an informed consent form at the end of the staff meeting and had the administrators and teachers read and signed the forms. I then established a date and time to participate in the survey; only before or after-school hours.

By signing the consent form, administrators, and teachers indicated that they understood the purpose of the study and agreed to participate in an on-line survey that I sent via e-mail, to be completed. The expected duration of the survey is approximately 10 minutes. All participation was voluntary, and participants may discontinue participation at any time with no negative consequences. Additionally, all participants privacy and confidentiality were upheld, per the Informed Consent Form guidelines.

Limitations

In addition to ethical considerations, I understand that my research while poignant, had its limitations. The focus of my research was a small private elementary school. The k-5 population consists of a modest 85 students: 97% being African American and 100% of the student body qualifying for free-and-reduced lunch. More than 87% of the attending students are being reared in a single parent household. As many as 75% of the student population received the McKay Scholarship. This allowed students with disabilities, 504 Plans or an active (IEP) plan, which documents a disability to attend a non-public school if the parent/guardian became displeased with the public education setting for their student. My data was analyzed by using both the qualitative survey data and quantitative test score, discipline and attendance data to demonstrate any direct correlations between the restorative practices program being instituted at One Elementary School and changes in student behavior, attendance and academics amongst their African American population. The small sample size may diminish the findings of this study and could possibly raise the margin of error. However, I challenge the readers of this work to observe the thoroughness and informative nature of this evaluation as a small sample size study to inform better practices and that offers insight into the potential

of restorative practices to transform school culture and increase student performance both academically and behaviorally.

Conclusion

The intent of this research was to strengthen the argument that restorative practices, such as progressive discipline within the educational environment, is effective at reducing in-school behavioral disturbances and increasing academic gains amongst at-risk student populations. Academic gain was measured by looking at the prior year's academic performance data and comparing it to the current year. It is imperative that school leaders remain at the forefront of shaping learning environments to maximize the potential of all students; therefore, scholarly insights gleaned for studies such as mine have the potential to make significant change by providing a guide for leadership as they further school improvement by enacting and fostering lasting change that we all seek within our schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Contextual Framework Informing the Results

The fundamental purpose of this chapter is to relay the findings of this study. All data collection and analysis were focused on an inquiry into the implementation of restorative practices at One Elementary School. This evaluation targets the student behavior, attendance, and academic outcomes at One Elementary School between 2017 through the 2019 school years. As a prelude to the discussion of the data collection and findings, I feel that the results must be again oriented within the central importance of school culture, restorative practices, and school leadership.

To further orientate the results to the school environment of One Elementary School, my analytical framework for processing and articulating my research findings are informed by Wagner and Kegan (2006) conceptualization of the institutional change process as composed of four areas: "competency, conditions, culture, and context" (p. 98). This approach provides a framework from which to reflectively contemplate the goals and challenges faced by educational leaders within our schools. A particular concern of my research is the problems that our educational leaders face that are of consequence to the need for the implementation of restorative practices: improving attendance and discipline in schools, managing admissions in schools, evaluating, and ensuring good grades in schools, designing, and implementing the curriculum in schools, supervising the performance of the teachers under the different faculties within the school and ensuring that they are working well together with schools. Restorative practices research such as this program evaluation has a direct bearing on the multitude of

challenges that face educational leaders in the 21st century. The cost associated with restorative practices implementation is of concern as educational leaders face inadequate financial resources leading to staffing issues. As a result, most schools remain understaffed, leaving most schools short-handed, resulting in low teacher to student ratios in schools (Wise, 2020). Lack of funding from the state also presents a decrease in opportunities for students from humble backgrounds who have continuing emerging challenges and massive disadvantages when compared to those from higher socioeconomic settings (Wise, 2020). In this context disciplinary issues arise as well as a lack of expectations for the students within my study to perform as well as their more socioeconomically advantaged peer groups. Teachers in schools face many issues that require them to alter and improve instruction in order to address the needs of the ever-growing diverse student population in their classrooms. Principals face the lack of time in each day to do their jobs due to the many issues and concerns that face them: discipline cases, facility issues, district administrative demands, and paperwork, while simultaneously looking after students' welfare and academic achievement (Wise, 2020). Disciplinary issues are compounded within the school environment when, as research and my findings demonstrate, the support and connection of the school with parents and the community become diminished. School leaders are facing high stakes testing accountability and these tests are becoming more and more rigorous (Wise, 2020). Principals struggle to maintain a balance between maintaining the high-test scores and providing high-quality education. The need is for a school environment that promotes student achievement, a sense of belonging, devoid of high risk and disruptive behaviors (Wise, 2020).

As of particular consequence to the school in which the study was conducted, the results, the qualitative and quantitative data connected during this research has been shared with the school administrative team both during my research process and at the conclusion of my research via email and phone conversations then verbally disseminated amongst the teachers at the school during a virtual staff meeting. In a greater context of the profession of education and educational research, my study is of consequence to the national need and leadership struggles facing our society. I position my research into restorative practices as one very specific intervention at one small school community to demonstrate restorative practices as a crucial potential tool for school leaders.

Survey Administration

The small staff size, which consisted of six teachers and two administrators, the dean of discipline, and the principal, allowed me to achieve 100% participation. Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, most communication was the telephone, email, text messages, and virtual meetings. For clarification purposes, no interviews took place. It also explained the voluntary/non-consequential nature of this study, gain verbal permission to conduct this research. Lastly, it was an opportunity to deliberate with school administrators on how this study would be conducted, given the constraints of being quarantined due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. Once the school administrators gave verbal permission to proceed, I was authorization to send the Administrator/Teacher Survey (Appendix A), an Informed Consent: Adult Participation Form to the principal and the dean of discipline. After the administrators read and completed the forms, they promptly disseminated the appropriate forms to their staff via email for completion.

Survey Results

My primary exploratory questions were answered during this program evaluation process. Teachers and administrators were asked on question #1 of the survey, what do the teachers and administrative staff report is working well with the restorative practices program at One Elementary School, and the responses echoed some commonalities. The responses reflected greater levels of consistency in disciplinary approach throughout every classroom, and staff acknowledgement of students practicing self-management regarding their behavior. However, when both teachers and administrators were asked on question #2 of the survey, what do the teachers and administrative staff report is not working well in the restorative practices program at One Elementary School, the entire staff unanimously agreed on the lack of parent support.

Additionally, I was able to answer my secondary/sub-questions through data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Teacher comments during virtual meetings reflected a desire for on-going professional development in the use and implementation of restorative practices and a desire to learn other types of instructional strategies when dealing with high-risk youth. Finally, after careful data analysis during regular school meetings, both teachers and administrators report observing that their African American students now demonstrate improved academic and behavior outcomes.

The surveys reflected 100% of staff participation, with six teachers and two administrators voluntarily completing the forms electronically. Both teachers and administrators were asked question one, what their job titles are? The survey responses confirmed that One Elementary School has exactly six teachers on staff and two administrators: the dean of discipline and the principal. Both teachers and administrators

were asked question two, how many years the survey participants have worked within

education. The survey results for question two, indicated that two (33%) teachers that

participated have been working within the education field for a minimum of three years.

Three (50%) teachers reported working within the field of education for a minimum of

four years. Lastly, only one (17%) teacher reported working within the education field for

nine years.
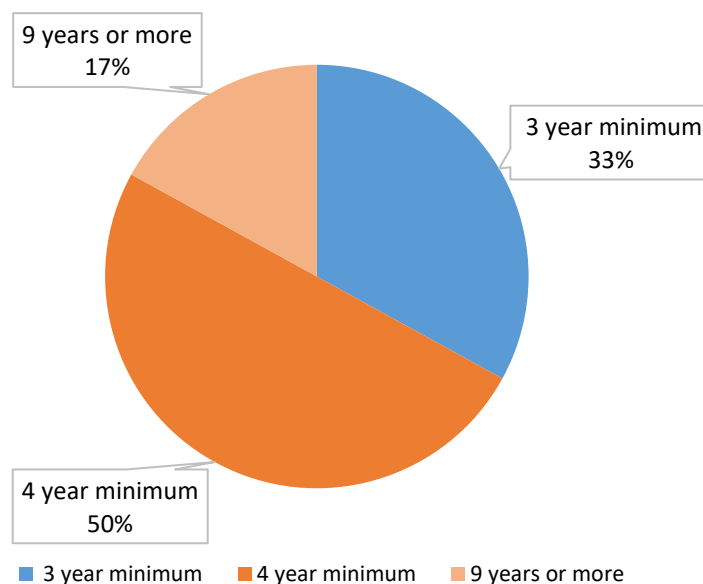
Figure 1. Survey question #2: teacher survey participants response to number of years in education, n = 6

The dean of discipline indicated that he has been working within education for a

minimum of seven years. The principal of One Elementary School has been in education

for a minimum of nine years. The amount of teaching experience becomes quite relevant

when addressing the needs that come with educating high-risk students. A teacher's

knowledge, skills, and delivery can have a positive impact on student achievement gains.

As an educational leader, havoc can undoubtedly occur when pairing high-risk/high-

needs students with unseasoned teachers. Seasoned teachers have experience with

preparing instructional materials, student testing, lesson planning, and instructional delivery. The interpersonal/relationship building skills complement these skills through the regular interactions between students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. Interpersonal relationship building skills create a suitable environment for learning, which positively affects the students. A good interpersonal relationship between the students and the teachers enables teachers to have the teaching skills to connect with their students and correlate with the experiences in learning that the students have. Interpersonal relationship building helps to build communication between the teachers, parents, and at-risk students. The construction of healthy interpersonal relationships establishes a sense of belonging for the students, and the students develop more interest and participate more in learning activities. The teachers, parents, and school administrators create a suitable learning environment where the students can openly view the challenges they face in school.

Teachers were asked in survey question three what they felt was working well with the use of restorative practices among their African American students at One Elementary School; 100% of the teachers feel that restorative practices are working well within their African American student population. The fifth-grade teacher stated that restorative practices have made dealing with undesirable student behavior more consistent between classrooms. The teacher shared that before using restorative practices, they had seriously contemplated quitting and leaving the field of education. The teacher described some of the past student behaviors as egregious and that she was not able to garner hardly any parental support. Five of the six (83%) teachers reported the sentiment regarding a lack of parent participation. During one of the Zoom Staff Meetings, one

teacher stated that "parents would not even answer our phone calls after a while"(cite withheld for anonymity). Upon hearing this statement, a follow-up question to gain more in-depth insight into whether other teachers experienced such behavior from the parents/guardians. The third-grade teacher reported that not only did parents not respond to most of their phone calls, but during the rare instances that the teacher was able to access the parents' telephone calls, the parent had even gone as far as to use belittling and abusive language towards them. Unfortunately, while administrators at One Elementary School stepped in to issue school consequences, student behaviors would eventually lapse, and in some cases, become even worse. These horrible student behaviors would eventually lead to two students being expelled from the school as they proved to be physically threatening to both students and staff.

The fourth-grade teacher shared one of the changes put into place by One Elementary School. The teacher stated that classroom behavioral expectations are posted within every classroom, restroom, and common areas. According to the teacher, this has led to students understanding what consequences await undesirable in-school behavior, so they are more apt to self-monitor their behavior.

Three (50%) of the teachers report improved student/teacher relationships taking place. The third-grade teacher stated that the learning environment is less tense when the students know that staff are willing to give them a second chance when they make mistakes. The fifth-grade teacher also reported on their survey that they had been a part of the school's inception within the community, and the teacher praised the vast amount of change that has taken place for the last three years. The second-grade teacher shared these sentiments by applauding the use of restorative talk, which is verbiage that supports

a shift away from criticism and shaming when communicating with students to more positive communication practices that lead toward cause analysis and repair. The second-grade teacher shared that they believed that as the teacher modeled restorative talk when communicating with the students, they began communicating more effectively with one another. Ultimately, a significantly reduced number of classroom disruptions due to students arguing. According to the data provided by the Data Management Technician (DMT), the second-grade data demonstrated this shift as the rate of students fighting dropped nearly 75% by year three of implementations.
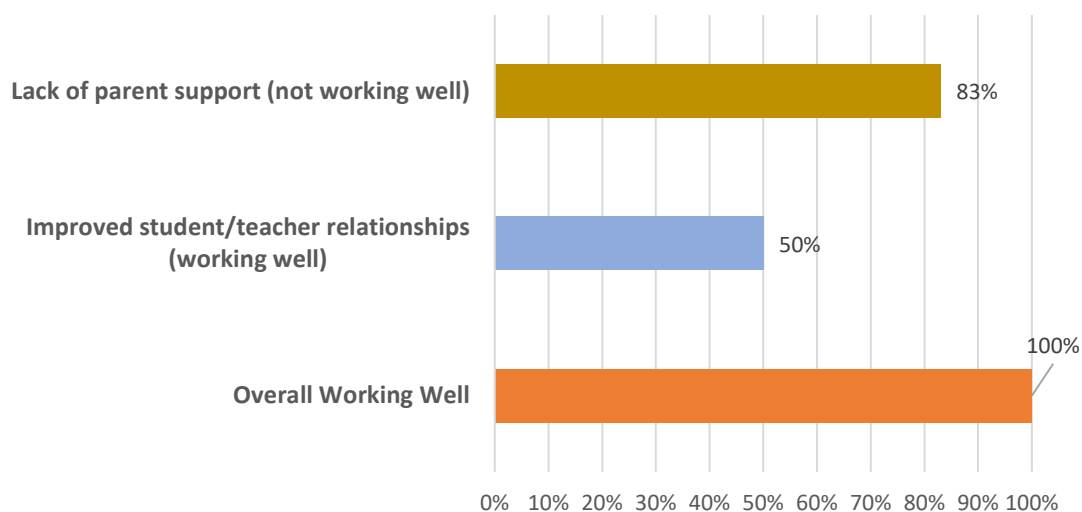
Figure 2. Survey question #3: teacher survey participants responses to what is working well with restorative practices, with what is not working well shared as well, n = 6

Administrators were asked in survey question #3 what they felt was working well with restorative practices among their African American students at One Elementary School. Administrators reported full support of the use of restorative practices at One Elementary Schools. However, they found that teachers were not implementing the program with fidelity and needed more training.

As a follow-up to survey question three, teachers were asked again in question four of the survey, what do you feel is not working well with the use of restorative practices among your African American students at One Elementary School? Interestingly, though only 83% mentioned parent participation and support in question three, in the responses to question #4 which asked specifically what was not working well, 100% of the teachers reported that they did not feel that parent support and participation in their student's educational process was consistent. The administrator's responses somewhat mirrored the teacher's sentiments of desiring to see parents participate in the student's educational process on a greater level. However, the administrators' responses reflected a bit more optimism due to the gradual improvements in parent participation between the 2017 school year to the 2020 school year: this information was exhibited by quantitative data to be shared later within evaluation findings. Two (33%) of the teachers expressed that they felt that more training was needed to properly implement the first attempts to implement restorative practices while dealing with such a challenging population.
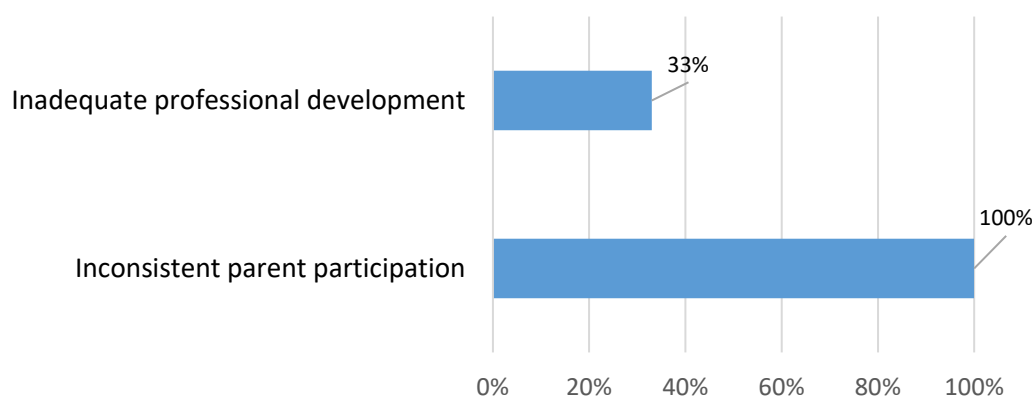
Figure 3. Survey question #4: teacher survey participants responses to what is not working with restorative practices, n = 6

Administrators were asked in question four; what do you feel is not working well with the use of restorative practices among your African American students at One Elementary School? During one of our Zoom calls, the principal and dean of One Elementary School reported incredible frustration during the first six months of implementing restorative practices. The principal shared that teachers lacked confidence in the process and continuously wanted administrative support to implement the restorative practices strategies. Therefore, additional training to remedy this issue. Administrators also put a peer partner system in place, where teachers that were stronger in the process could mentor struggling teachers. The school's dean shared these sentiments by sharing that "it was exhausting running back and forth to classrooms every day, so we had to do something" (citation withheld for anonymity). However, after addressing the need for continued teacher training and adding the peer-to-peer support system, the process yielded a 13% decrease in behavioral referrals versus the prior school year.

Administrators and teachers were asked in survey question five if they would recommend the use of restorative practices to a friend or colleague. Their responses indicated their level of agreement by their choice of a range between not at all likely, likely, and extremely likely. The survey results reflected that 60% of all teachers would recommend using restorative practices to a friend or colleague. The remaining 40% of teachers stated that they would be extremely likely to recommend restorative practices to friends or colleagues. Both administrators' responses reflected the extreme likelihood of recommending restorative practices to a friend or colleague.

Table 1.

Responses to Question 5. Administrator/Teacher Survey: Would you recommend using the restorative practices to a friend or colleague?

Categories	Respondent	Percentage
Teachers		
Not at all likely	0	0%
Likely	4	60%
Extremely likely	2	40%
Administrators		
Not at all likely	0	0%
Likely	0	0%
Extremely likely	2	100%

Teachers were asked in survey question six if they had any other comments or concerns? One fifth-grade teacher expressed concerns that while restorative practices have revolutionized the way interactions occur with students, parents, and even other school staff, the teacher worries about the students' who transition to middle school within the public-school setting. During a follow-up phone call, this teacher began expressing the challenges that their youngest daughter experienced with bullying in middle school sharing that it became so bad that the daughter even contemplated suicide. The teacher stated that "we have done the work to create a restorative environment here, but other schools aren't like ours" (citation withheld for anonymity). Though her daughter's experience was traumatic, I was able to assure the teacher that the local school district had begun to implement restorative practices in upper grades and that if the teachers equip students with the knowledge of these practices, there is hope that students transitioning to middle school we be better equipped to interact more positively. The teacher appreciated these comments because they eliminated understandable anxieties regarding the students continued well-being.

In question six, teachers instructing the fourth and fifth grades reported that during year one of implementation, student behaviors seemed to worsen during the first semester of school, which is the first nine weeks of school being in session. Teachers were only able to get between 25-30% of their students to conform to the use of restorative circles to solve conflict with their peers. Therefore, student conflicts would be ongoing, resulting in fights and increased profanity use during student-on-student communications. The fourth and fifth-grade teachers recount that what changed the original course that initial implementation took was having restorative conferences with families, some of which took place within the family's homes. The fifth-grade teachers stated that "once we started doing restorative circles with students and parents, the parents became our allies once they understood that we cared about their kids" (cite withheld for anonymity). Unfortunately, the data management technician was unable to produce 1st year behavioral data to support the teacher concerns. The k-3 teachers did not report having the same issues. However, after the first semester, the buy-in from students significantly increased. The second-grade teacher recounted students telling one another, "you ain't being restorative", which demonstrated their willingness to take ownership of the execution of restorative practices within the classroom.

The principal of One Elementary School expressed concerns over the lack of protective factors in the students' lives, potentially causing them to move away from restorative talk and behavior eventually. This implementation of restorative practices affected the students' in-school performance and increased students' potential, especially those with special needs, not graduating high school. The principal shared the recent uptick in juvenile vehicular theft, home invasions, and murder at an all-time high. The

principal had this to say on the issues "most prevalent in the African American and

Hispanic communities." Unfortunately, understanding this horrifying trend is personal as

eight former students have expired due to their participation in high risk behaviors,

vehicular theft and gang violence. Based on local statistics presented by

NeighborhoodScout.com, the chances of succumbing to a violent crime is one in 160,

versus the state average of one in 260 people (Crime Rates, Statistics and Crime Data for

every Address in America NeighborhoodScout, 2020).

Table 2.

Violent Crime Comparison (Per 1000 Residents) Data*

MY CHANCES OF BECOMING A VICTIM OF A VIOLENT CRIME	
City	State
1 in 160	1 in 260
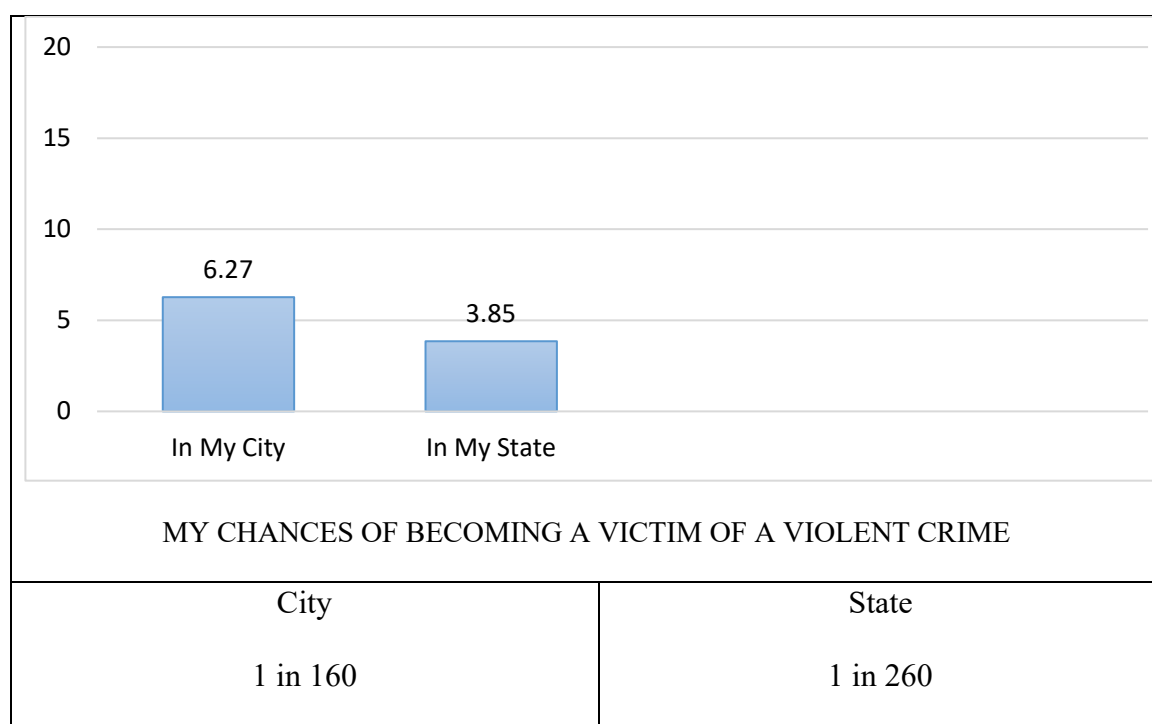
*SOURCE: Acquired 09/20/2020 from NeighborhoodScout.com, Crime Rates, Statistics
and Crime Data for every Address in America, 2020.

Lastly, the dean of discipline shared that restorative practices transformed their

school community. Restorative practices positively changed the way students interacted

with staff and with one another. The dean shared the challenges of initial implementation;

and the lack of open house-style meetings that would inform them of the change in discipline approach versus impersonal emails, automated voice messages, and school newsletters that may never have made it home. The dean went on to say that "it was all about us building relationships with students, parents and with each other" (citation withheld for anonymity).

School Data

School data was appropriated via email from One Elementary Schools Data Management contact. My purpose was to collect pertinent data that might demonstrate how restorative practices have affected the overall school community. Analyzing the student behavior, attendance, and academic performance data qualitatively identifies whether students are buying into a healthy school community's ideal. The teacher and administrative surveys served as a method to collect participant demographic information and provide a qualitative resource to explain better and understand the impact of restorative practices at One Elementary School throughout a three-year timespan.

What is important to mention is that restorative practices started to be implemented during the 2017-2018 school year, and that only third, fourth and fifth graders take mid-year and end-of-course examinations. According to the Annual Academic Data for the 2017-2018 school year, only 27% of students demonstrated proficiency in reading, and 18% of students demonstrated proficiency in mathematics. During the 2018-2019 school year, 38% of students demonstrated proficiency in reading, and 24% of students demonstrated proficiency in mathematics. During the 2019-2020 school year, the students displayed even more academic promise, with 51% of students demonstrating proficiency in reading and 33% demonstrating proficiency in mathematics.

Table 3.

Annual Academic Data for 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and the 2019-2020 School Years at

One Elementary School
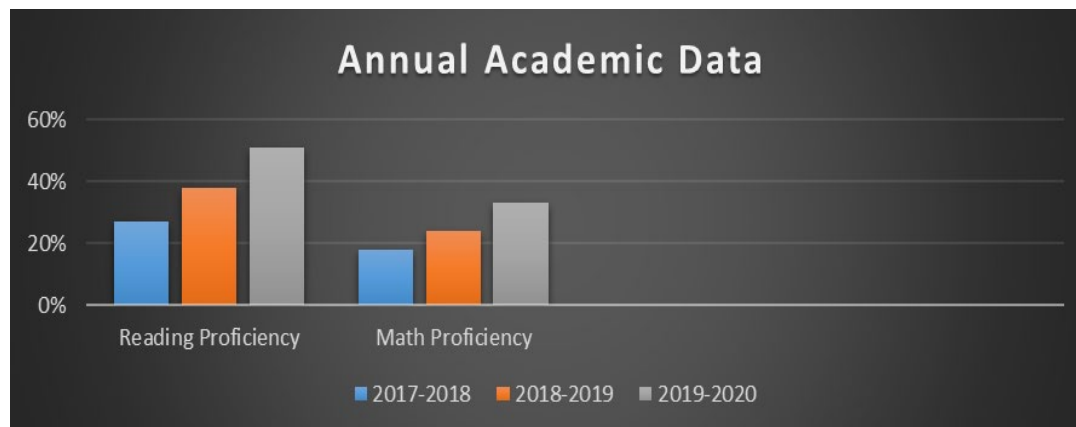
During the 2017-2018 school year, 44% of students had an unexcused absence, 11% had an excused absence, and 45% were present. During the 2018-2019 school year, 28% of students had an unexcused absence, 18% had an excused absence, and 54% were present. Lastly, in the 2019-2020 school year, 25% of students had an unexcused absence, 17% had an excused absence, and 58% were present. The principal speculated that the 2019-2020 numbers would have shown even more improvement if the school did not have to go to a virtual format due to the COVID-19 global pandemic that occurred in March with approximately 60 days remaining in the school year.

Table 4.

Annual Attendance Rates for 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and the 2019-2020 school years at

One Elementary School.
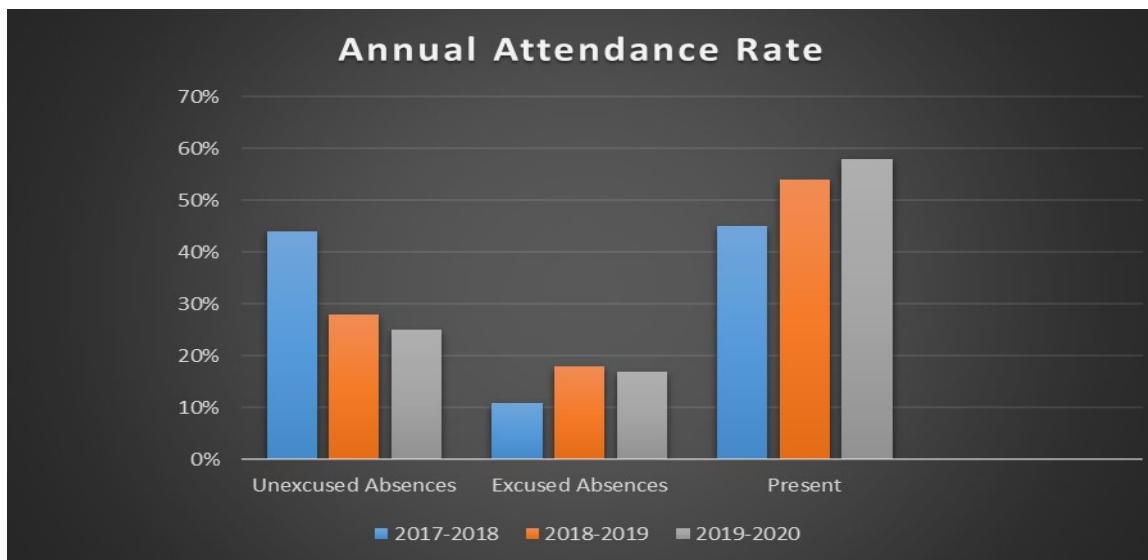
One Elementary Schools' referrals are written for the following reasons: profanity, fighting, classroom disruption, and bullying. Analyzation of the Annual Behavior Referral Data revealed that for the 2017-2018 school year, 22 referrals issued for profanity, 18 referrals for fighting, 33 referrals for classroom disruptions, and 8 for bullying. During the 2018-2019 school year, 18 referrals were issued for profanity, 13 referrals for fighting, 19 referrals for classroom disruptions, and five for bullying. Lastly, during the 2019-2020 school year, 11 referrals were issued for profanity, six referrals for fighting, 12 referrals for classroom disruptions, and three for bullying. Hence, one could reasonably assert that since the implementation of restorative practices at One Elementary School, student growth and development has indeed occurred. This data reflects an 11% decrease in referrals written for profanity, a 12% decrease in referrals for fighting, a 21% decrease in referrals for classroom disruption, and a 2% decrease in

referrals for bullying over only three years of restorative practices implementation.

Table 5.

Annual Behavior Referral Data for 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and the 2019-2020 School Years at One Elementary School
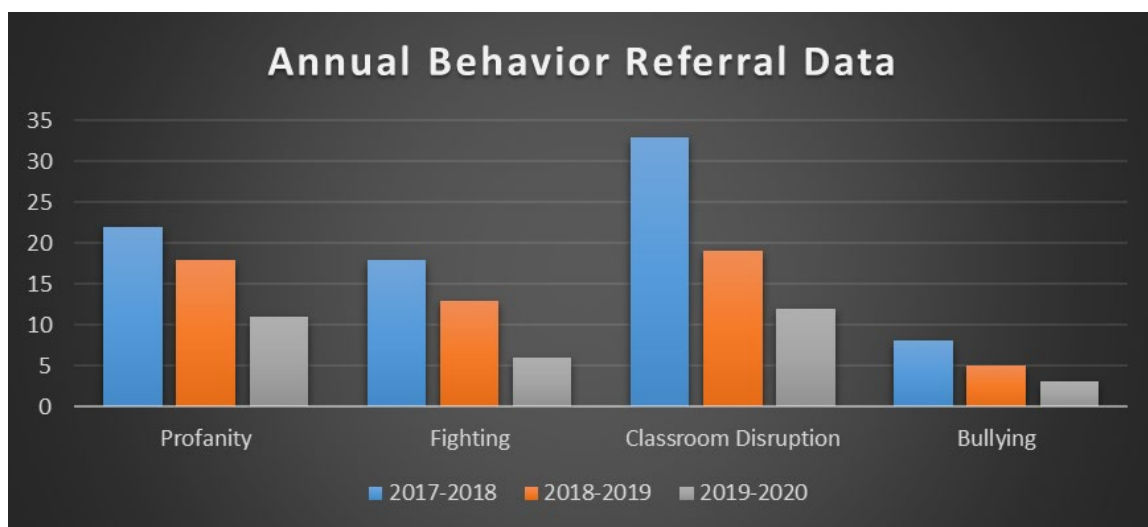
Context

One Elementary School is a religious private school that benefits from the more general practice of the families' religious faith they generally have their students attend versus the public-school setting. However, while positive practices such as these exist, some cons with this method as well. One of the main drawbacks is the fact that tuition is required to attend. Additionally, students may face curriculum constraints, such as those that may appear within evolutionary science that do not traditionally parallel Christian preconceptions. The religious belief system at One Elementary School profoundly impacts the entire organization's work, creating a culture that distinguishes itself from many other educational institutions.

One hundred percent of the population served at One Elementary School is African American, 67% of whom are male. Also, 100% of the student population

qualifies for free-and-reduced meals, demonstrating that their families live in poverty. Schools and the populace tend to reflect African American boys in a negative light. According to Books (2007), African American boys categorized as being: vicious, discourteous, stupid, hypersexualized, and menacing. When intertwined with low socio-economic standings, images such as these lead to this population being at-risk for lower academic outcomes.

Furthermore, teachers at One Elementary School report that one of the main barriers to student success is low parent participation. Thus, while positive behavioral modifications and academic growth have been achieved after implementing restorative practices, staff survey responses clearly show that school staff believes that if parents took a more active role in their students' educational process, the outcomes could have been amplified. Administrators still desire more significant levels of parent participation. The principal and dean occasionally conducted home visits during the second semester of restorative practices implementation. However, the principal admittedly stated that home visits should have been taking place much sooner during the 2017-2018 school year, which was when the Restorative Practices program was implemented, to promote student/parent buy-in and quell undesired student behaviors.

During one of the scheduled Zoom meetings, the third-grade teacher shared some initial apprehensiveness about moving to a new discipline model. The teacher also stated that restorative practices were "quick-fix remedies for something that could never be fixed." Over time, this same third-grade teacher understood that restorative practices were more of a philosophy that required not just that the students change but that every staff member would have to change for things to work. In essence, the teacher experienced a

shift in mindset. This shift made the teacher see that the successful implementation of restorative practices depended more on a collaborative effort versus another directive to be fulfilled by the administrative team. This change aligned itself perfectly with the central premise of restorative practices "that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them" (Costello et al., 2018, p. 7).

Culture

One Elementary School does not have the presiding district oversight. As a private educational institution primarily grant-funded, the school reserves the right to teach and integrate Christian ideology and doctrine into the curriculum in an uncontested fashion. This also allows the school the privilege of not having to grapple with secular laws that divide religious entities and public educational institutions. Nevertheless, while public educational institutions willingly divert from endorsing any one religion or theology over another, the access to local, state, and federal funding sources makes it very difficult to dismiss their value; and their ability to impact a student's college career readiness on a much grander scale. As a teacher leader within the presiding school district, what was immediately noticeable was the lack of a clear professional development strategy. The State Department of Education places very high demands on individuals seeking to become educators or those needing to maintain their certification standing as an educator. Therefore, while some professional development is voluntary, most professional development participation is mandatory for public school teachers to maintain their teaching credentials. They are creating a system of accountability and

professional growth opportunities. The teachers of One Elementary School demonstrated professionalism, passion, and great care for their students. However, the lack of a clear professional development strategy and the financial resources to do as much as the public educational institutions could eventually siphon the teaching staff's strength as they continue to disconnect from innovative teaching strategies that could accelerate their students' academic growth and development.

Lindsey (2009) asserts that school leaders must learn to work collaboratively with teachers, students, parents, and other community stakeholders to promote success and high academic achievement. Nevertheless, while One Elementary Schools administrative staff have conceptually understood this notion of collaborative leadership, implementing how to go about engaging parents and community stakeholders has not been very successful. This lack of success has created a schism between the teachers and parents as teachers have all but lost confidence in their willingness to consistently work as a collaborative partner in their student's educational process.

Conditions

For One Elementary School, the prospects of continuing to progress and effectively use restorative practices are extremely undermined by the existing work conditions. Conditions are defined as "the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources" (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 101). Consequently, a learning environment's conditions play a vital role in our students' success as policies and processes.

The small class sizes at One Elementary School made individualized instruction more optimal versus a much larger public-school classroom. Excellent student-teacher

ratios come with a hefty price for private educational institutions. To fulfill these ratios, the school needs to have many financial resources to pay their staff. However, the school experiences inadequacy of financial resources due to a lack of proper funding from the state. Therefore, the school is limited in professional development, relying heavily on donations, grant funding, and charging students tuition to attend. Minimal access to the proper funding sources provided within the public education system has hindered the school's ability to build better facilities and provide the same level of exposure to the specialized materials provided in public education for their students. Additionally, teachers have a minimal amount of time for lesson planning because of the non-flexibility of the school's master schedule due to limited staffing. Issues such as poor instructional planning could only exacerbate the challenges faced by an educator when an overwhelming number of students have learning disabilities and socio-emotional difficulties.

Competencies

The principal of One Elementary School explained that only two of the six teachers possessed a state certification in Special Education. Therefore, staff members who have taught an average of three or more years, their knowledge and experience with outstanding education students and their unique needs and challenges are limited. Thus, the initial behavioral and academic hurdles that led the administrators toward researching alternative disciplinary approaches was a very prudent decision, mostly when many of the staff lacked hard competencies skills in special education.

Teachers understanding of restorative practices is limited. Thus, a lack of understanding hampers staff buy-in. For successful program implementation to take

place, staff must gain a deeper familiarity with the historical relevance of restorative practices. Ultimately, the goal would be to help teachers connect the use of restorative practices and their capacity of addressing the needs at One Elementary School.

The significance of these results demonstrate that restorative practices have positively impacted academic outcomes, student behaviors, and attendance at One Elementary School. The findings indicate that since the implementation of restorative practices, One Elementary School has experienced gains in every data category. Before using restorative practices, the school relied on a more punitive disciplinary model that bred adversarial student/teacher relationships, increased parent distrust, and highlighted out-of-school suspensions and expulsions as the best corrective options to address unsavory student behavior. According to Gregory (2013), restorative practices are increasingly being utilized in multiple schools to reduce reliance on out-of-school suspensions and decrease the gap between African American students and their Caucasian counterparts. Restorative practices focus on the art of relationship building and collaborative problem solving to address campus behavioral issues whenever they arise. "Thus, the notion of restorative encompasses more than a set of procedures that occur after a rule infraction" (Gregory, 2016, p. 328).

The use of restorative practices in schools has many advantages. From the study, we have seen that punitive disciplinary measures such as detention and suspensions were not sufficient and negatively affected the students than positive ones. Thus, the results turned out the way they did because the students responded positively to being addressed as kids versus criminals inherently worthy of punishment. In this study, I show that the punitive disciplinary model has little to no change in student behavior. It does not focus

on the causative factors that lead to misbehavior among students. The punitive disciplinary method makes it so hard for a student to recover in academics due to the time lost while on punishment. It is also a waste of time for teachers and the school administration as more time would have been spent on more productive things like preparing for classes. According to Simon (2014), the use of restorative practices in schools has also led to a decrease in school dropouts. Students who are corrected through punitive measures repeatedly are more prone to aggravate their behavioral issues. They are more likely to drop out, mainly if teachers had not worked with such students before. The use of restorative practices has also led to an improvement in academic performance in schools. In reconstructive practice, students are confronted constructively and are less likely to fall behind in academics. Therefore, these students' chances to drop out of school are reduced drastically, and their behavioral issues are less likely to occur repeatedly. The restorative practices program has also led to enhanced levels of safety within the schools. Cases of bullying and violence have dropped in the school. Restorative practices are positive in its approach where the students are highly valued, bringing about a positive behavioral change in the students compared to the punitive measures. Implementing Restorative Practices has reduced the view that the school administration is biased towards sure students, particularly in schools with mixed demography. This occurs because reconstructive practice focuses constructively on the students in comparison to punitive measures.

Judgments

The school data and survey responses have yielded positive results. The educators represented at One Elementary School found that student behaviors vastly improved over

time, as behavior referrals that in most instances resulted in an out-of-school suspension being levied decreased 39.73%.

As the student/teacher relationships improved, the learning environment became fruitful, as evidenced by the continued academic gains throughout three years. The school showed a 15% increase in students' proficiency in mathematics and a 24% increase in reading proficiency between 2017-2020. The behavior data also demonstrated promising results with decreases in referrals in every category: profanity (11%), fighting (12%), classroom disruption (21%), and bullying (5%) over three years. The attendance rates also improved between the 2017-2020 school years as unexcused absences dropped 19%, excused absences increased 6%, and the number of students increased by 13%. These gains occurred amongst a high-risk, African American student population, giving further credence to the use of restorative practices within an education setting. The use of restorative practices has been shown to have many benefits in schools, leading to a drop in bullying, violence, and disruption within schools and a significant drop in the number of juvenile crimes. Through this research I have shown that restorative practices have helped students' involvement in the school's processes when being disciplined. This practice has given the students a voice, which has been positively received by the students.

The results of this evaluation answer my research questions in the following ways. I learned what staff reports is and is not working well with the restorative practices program at One Elementary School. According to survey results, all the staff members concur that the use of restorative practices has positively affected the student's behavior. However, one teacher reported that after three years of program implement, they

expected to see a greater level of parent participation. Additionally, one teacher reported that they felt that the administrators seemed inconsistent when disciplining certain students.

During virtual meetings, teachers reported their perceptions of professional development that would support better program implement. The professional development mentioned referenced on-going training in the use of restorative practices, ways to increase parent participation and teaching strategies to engage high-risk youth. It was very encouraging to hear teachers take such onus for trying to improve their instructional practice. They exhibited professionalism and a subtle warmth and connectedness to their students that for all my years and experience in education have rarely witnessed.

Lastly, teachers report observing changes in their data regarding students' academic progress and behavior amongst their African American population. During the implementation process of the restorative practices program, a greater level of emphasis has been placed on data analysis, especially during staff meetings and professional development activities. This change regularly exposes teachers to the practice of analyzing, interpreting and then collaboratively formulating plans to address any gaps within their instruction.

Recommendations

Developing a stimulating educational environment has many benefits, including improved academic achievement, discouraging unsociable in-school behaviors, and quelling student, family, and teacher disputes through collaboration. One Elementary School is one of many schools that has realized that more can be achieved when

administrators, teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders work together. Using restorative practices has made relationship building a priority when considering what actions are in students' best interest. Hence, the move to incorporate restorative practices into the fabric of this private learning environment was an excellent decision, especially when considering the multiplicity of needs in the population they serve. This writer recommends that the school continue its use of restorative practices but increase its knowledge of best practices and implementation. Restorative circles should increase and take place beyond collaboratively working towards healing the learning environment after harm has occurred; it should be used to build communication and accountability proactively. "As students and teachers learn about one another in proactive circles, they can develop a sense of shared authority/ownership over the classroom climate to increase accountability" (Gregory et al., 2016, p. 329). The organizational changes I feel are needed would be enhanced professional development, focusing on teaching strategies in mathematics and reading. The academic data revealed that while students made academic gains, 76% remained not proficient in mathematics, and 49% remained not proficient in reading at the end of the third year of the implementation of restorative practices. Besides, ongoing training in the understanding and application of restorative practices should occur as attendance data indicates that 42% of the student population is not consistently attending school. While the behavior data demonstrates gains, if any undesired student behavior still exists, the job of total school transformation remains incomplete. Teachers need to have more training on restorative practices as it improved students' attendance within the school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of restorative practices at One Elementary School has been successful. In this evaluation, I analyzed the school's academic, attendance, and behavior data throughout three years. After a comparative analysis of the 2017-2018, 2018-2019 data and the 2019-2020 school years, student achievement increased by 15% in mathematics and 24% in reading. Unexcused absences decreased by 19%, excused absences increased by 6%, and the number of students presents increased by 13%. After implementing restorative practices, the behavior data as the number of behavior referrals that resulted in an out-of-school suspension decreased 39.73% throughout the same three-year time-period between 2017-2020. The need for more effective implementation of restorative practices in schools must be fulfilled. From the study, it is apparent that restorative practices in schools positively affects students in school. It has created a positive learning environment for all students in schools and ensured that all learners have an equal chance to succeed in school. The school administrator, the principal, or teachers can undergo restorative practices training if a coordinator cannot be hired. Schools should adopt the use of restorative justice as a disciplinary method. Parents and the whole community should also be more involved in the restorative practices model. The school discipline manual should also contain restorative discipline practices, and referral forms to contain restorative practices should be made. The school should also develop a database that contains all the situational instances where restorative practices are implemented and adequately document the results. Students should also be trained in restorative practices to create a positive environment to talk freely. The goal would be to maximize the use of restorative justice in schools eventually.

CHAPTER FIVE

To-Be Framework

According to Wagner and Kegan (2006) a thesis writer should cultivate a strategy that reflects prospects for organizational change and reflect leadership strategies for growth and development. In recommending this change, the writer focuses on the current contexts, competencies, culture, and conditions that exist within the organization. Additionally, I have performed organizational research via surveys, Zoom meetings, and thorough analysis of One Elementary Schools: attendance, behavioral, and academic data. The evaluator/thesis writer imagines and communicates the specific areas within the organization utilizing the To-Be Framework that would need to be modified to maximize organizational outcomes (Appendix C).

The need for continued research in restorative practices is paramount; as continued directives from federal, state, and local officials demand that schools improve and respond to the task of creating citizens that are prepared for a 21st Century workforce. Therefore, educational leaders have traditionally responded to such demands with the construction loftier school improvement plans that feature multiple curriculum changes and cutting-edge instructional strategies. Notwithstanding these necessary changes and schools experiencing nominal success; restorative practices respond to the very same demands with a much broader approach. Restorative practices use the concept of authentic relationship building to spearhead a domino effect of change within the learning environment. As a result, while instructional delivery receives adequate attention, restorative practices illuminate the fact that even the best instructional strategies will flounder within a toxic learning environment. Unfortunately, many schools still maintain learning environments that are charged with adversarial undercurrents due

to fractured student/staff relationships that only exacerbate negative student behaviors and ultimately increase gaps in student learning and institutional progress.

After completing this research, the issues demonstrated are not uncommon with the struggles of many schools across the nation that have chosen to use restorative practices as a research-based means of repairing and strengthening the learning environment. The issues identified are students with high risk factors versus high protective factors, poor parent/community involvement, and teacher training deficits. The goal writing this paper is to act as an agent of change, focused on supporting this schools' steps towards resolving some of the named issues.

There is a familiar, often quoted old African proverb that says, "It takes a village to raise a child." This expression is apt in expressing the need in educational contexts to facilitate collaboration on all fronts to foster children's growth and learning within our school communities. To improve community involvement, parents are invited to attend monthly virtual meetings to contribute to shared decision making. Parent tutorial sessions have been created, and occur once a week, to teach parents how to work one-on-one with their learners on academic tasks. Administrators continue to conduct home-visits to provide support to struggling students and their families. Additionally, a visual depiction of the available community-based resources has been created to present to staff. This is a means of cultivating lasting partnerships with community stakeholders. For example, the school will create a partnership with local libraries as important connection points beyond the classroom environment. Lastly, this thesis writer serves the school in a consultation capacity to continue training staff in the use and application of restorative practices.

Organizational Change

Organizational change entails a shift in operational norms. This may cause angst to materialize amongst those who have grown accustomed to the original way of work. However, initial resistance should not be a deterrent from leadership doing what is in the best interest of students, and to doing what will spurn on organizational progress. To facilitate essential change and lessen staff anxiety, staff inclusionary practices should occur at a micro-level to encourage staff buy-in. Therefore, the key to successful restorative practices implementation should not be about students becoming acquainted with what, why and how of restorative practices. Rather, all staff should themselves be immersed in restorative practices, with all its strategies, language and approach to teaching and learning.

Visualizing the Success To-Be

The As-Is chart, presented in Appendix B, illustrates the issues identified as probable hinderances to student outcomes. Teachers and administrators conveyed their awareness of a need to change their school's climate and culture as student disciplinary issues soured all past hopes of achieving set organizational gains. This prompted the school to revert from its more punitive disciplinary practices that seemingly exacerbated their issues and adopt the use of restorative practices. Currently, One Elementary School has implemented the restorative practices program for approximately three years. However, as the school strategizes ways to continuing growing in the right direction, the school's leadership have availed themselves to considering the ideas shared in my To-Be framework chart (Appendix C). The To-Be chart suggests strategies for organizational modifications to enhance the implementation of the restorative practices program,

improve academic outcomes, and increase parent participation.

Context

As stated in chapter four of this writer's thesis, One Elementary School is a small religious private school. One hundred percent of the student population is African American, with 67% of its attendees being male. In Addition, 100% of the student population qualifies for free-and-reduced meals, displaying that their families live in poverty. The school has historically experienced low student achievement, with poor attendance, student disciplinary issues and low parent participation as contributing factors. Survey data indicates that 100% of the staff agrees that restorative practices are beneficial at their school. This type of staff response creates ideal conditions for transformational change to develop, versus the corrosive undercurrent of staff resistance. The need for staff buy-in is endorsed by Kotter (2012) in that the consequences of staff resistance is devastating to the implementation of even the most promising of programs, "people will find a thousand ingenious ways to withhold cooperation from a process that they sincerely think is unnecessary" (p. 38).

Conditions

Wagner and Kegan (2006) states that "one clear way to improve students' literacy skills is to simply have them spend more of their day reading and writing" (p. 112). This statement reflects the benefits of students receiving increased instructional time so they can move towards curriculum mastery. Since the implementation of Restorative Practices between 2017-2019, unexcused absences have decreased 56.82%, behavior referrals that in most instances resulted in an out-of-school suspension being levied has decreased 39.73%. These numbers are very important when the academic data reflects that reading

proficiency has increased 52.94% and mathematics has increased 54.55% over the same

three-years between 2017-2019.
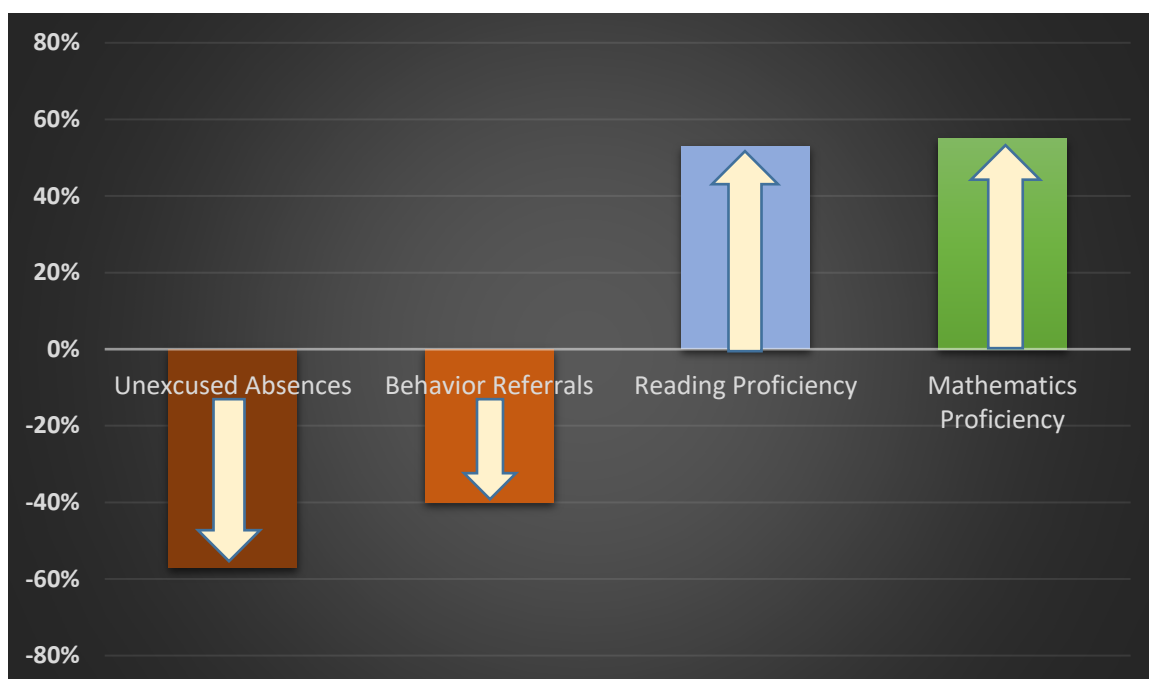
Figure 4. Trends for 2017-2019 in four key performance variables

The small class sizes are conducive for increase one-on-one and small group

instruction to close student learning gaps. Moreover, teachers feel supported as parents

attend weekly tutorial sessions to gain understanding of how to they can actively aide

their students with homework, projects and studying. During parent tutorial meetings,

teachers are also encouraged to communicate course expectations and to see if there exist

any needs that the school can help with. This type of communication provides a

wonderful opportunity to share about the various community-based resources that are

available to support local families.

Lastly, on-going professional development to equip staff to address the socio-

emotional challenges of dealing with high-risk youth. This thesis writer will serve the

school as in a consultant/trainer capacity in the use and implementation of restorative practices. Teacher and administrators are strongly encouraged to facilitate restorative circles as a part of the students social emotional learning at the beginning of everyday during homeroom. This will allow students and staff to stay in an open communicative space so that trust and genuine relationship building can continue. According to Costello et al. (2009) "students will learn that you genuinely care about them and are truly excited when they do well" (p. 13).

Culture

As previously stated in chapter four, Lindsey (2009) asserts that school leaders must learn to work collaboratively with teachers, students, parents, and other community stakeholders to promote success and high academic achievement. Thus, the use of restorative practices is used as a vehicle to build communication, trust, and accountability. Trust, that assures that both students and staff members voices can be heard; even when disagreements occur. As students and staff seek to have improved communication, where respect is maintained in mediums like restorative circles where a talking piece is utilized. The idea behind the use of the talking piece, is to establish norms that consider that only one individual can speak when the talking piece is held, while the listener actively listens, and only responds when it is their turn to hold the talking piece.

Ongoing professional development is being executed in the form of daily in-class observations with administration feedback, weekly professional learning community (PLC) meetings and periodic workshops to enhance their teacher knowledge and application of best instructional and restorative practices. Professional development assists teachers with data-based lesson planning. This promotes instructional efficiency,

which allows teachers more opportunities time to focus on students and re-teaching when necessary.

Lastly, parents have begun to attend weekly tutorial sessions to help students with homework and projects. Students communicate their academic and social needs with their teachers, as a safe learning environment has been created. Parents have begun to take advantage of the community-based resources shared with them from the school to address complex socio-emotional needs that could hinder student success, such as housing stability issues. Students are held to higher levels of accountability for their behaviors and academics as teachers, administrators and parent communication has improved as everyone works collaboratively to ensure student success.

Competencies

Teachers are successfully using restorative talk and classroom circles to improve communication with students. Restorative talk has and listening strategies have strengthened staff's ability to identify student's scholastic and socio-emotional needs. Students/Teacher interactions are no longer adversarial in nature, as students, staff, parents, and the community have begun to recognize One Elementary School as an educational institution that truly cares about its students. Lastly, teachers are better able to apply the best instructional practices and other appropriate teaching strategies without disruptive student behaviors hindering their effectiveness. "One of the basic premises of restorative practices is that human beings are happiest, healthiest and most likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them" (Costello et al., 2018, p. 96).

Conclusion

This writers program evaluation examined the use of restorative practices at One

Elementary School. Furthermore, organizational research was gathered using surveys, Zoom meetings, and thorough analysis of the schools: attendance, behavioral and academic data. The problems identified at One Elementary School are students with high risk factors versus high protective factors, poor parent/community involvement, and teacher training deficits. envisioning the success To-Be, at One Elementary School prompted the evaluator/thesis writer to communicate identifiable areas within the organization that would need to be modified to increase organizational outcomes.

CHAPTER SIX

Strategies and Actions

In this section, I will bridge the "As-Is" and the "To-Be" conceptualizations with a series of strategies and actions based upon research and best practice in organizational theory, professional development, leadership strategies, and communication strategies. A snapshot of the identified "As-Is" challenges are as such: students with high risk factors versus high protective factors, poor parent/community involvement, and teacher training deficits. According to Wagner et al. (2006), to effectively move towards the proposed organizational objectives, using the 4C's (context, culture, conditions, and competencies) one must: create a picture for success, build the "To Be" picture, identify current strategies and then consider the current strategies. This methodology for initiating organizational change provides an outline for how to thoughtfully project the future of the organization if the identified issues were solved.

The strategies that I have chosen will speak to specific issues identified in each of the four arenas for change (context, culture, conditions, and competencies). The strategies selected have one common theme in mind, and that is the goal of enhancing teaching and learning within One Elementary School. Thus, the use of restorative practices affords schools the opportunity for a range of pedagogical strategies to become effective. The use of restorative practices, such as restorative circles, can unify the objectives of "community building and academic achievement so that students are strengthening relationships while addressing content areas" (Costello et al., 2009, p. 27). Additionally, restorative circles can function as a progress monitoring tool. Students are presented with an opportunity to provide one another feedback and communicate individual academic

achievements. This type of community building shifts the classroom focus away from the teacher, back to the students taking ownership over their educational process.

Strategies and Action Plan

I will provide a comprehensive description of the strategies that will be required for organizational change and note the actions needed to achieve the strategies. I will use the As-Is conceptualization (Appendix B) to reflect the ideals presented within the To-Be conceptualization (Appendix C). The Strategies and Action Plan (SAP) (Appendix D) details appropriate methods for promoting improvement. I will utilize the SAP to explain how I plan on successfully moving the subject of this study from the As-Is conceptualization to the To-Be conceptualization.

I structured the Strategies and Action Plan for the Change Leadership Plan portion of this study in five phases:

Phase 1: Data Collection, Analysis, Interpretation and Action Planning.

Phase 2: Building Buy-In

Phase 3: Maximize the teaching and learning experience.

Phase 4: Increase parent involvement.

Phase 5: Generating More Change

Each phase is designed with the purpose of illustrating best leadership and communication practices/strategies to move the restorative practices program forward; and ultimately connect the As-Is and the To-Be to successfully demonstrate the use of restorative practices within the educational environment.

Phase 1

      I will use data as the catalyst for informed decision making that appropriately addresses the needs and identifiable outcomes at One Elementary School. Therefore, data must be analyzed to cultivate a greater understanding of the school's current predicament, and then I promptly reported my findings to school leadership. Ideally, this approach will lead to sustainable and enduring change as data are utilized imaginatively, persuasively, and purposefully to concentrate on the needs of the children we serve (Wagner and Kegan, 2006).

      I collected and analyzed qualitative data by surveying administrators and instructional staff (Appendix A). This method of inquiry communicated through language, and staff experiences, gave insight into staff's thoughts and opinions on the success and failures of the restorative practices program at One Elementary School. Patton describes program evaluation in *Utilization Focused Evaluation* (2008) as having the aim of enhancing efficacy by providing data concerning the extent to which implementation is affecting the goals desired.

      Additionally, I gathered and evaluated quantitative data reflecting One Elementary Schools' attendance, behavior, and academic status from the 2017-2019 school years. The importance of this information is paramount, as disruptive student behaviors once plagued the learning environment. These negative student behaviors compromised student and staff safety, and hindered attendance rates as many in-and-out of school suspensions were being issued; and as students spent less time engaging in instructional tasks, academic outcomes were severely affected. Informed by this viewpoint, I gained clarity on how to appropriately respond to the school's issues.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) support the idea of using data to create an informed perspective, as it empowers one to address the adaptive challenges that may exist within an institution. Ultimately, the data reflected novel changes in student attendance, behavior referrals, and academic gains because of the implementation of restorative practices.

Restorative Practices is progressively becoming a welcomed alternative to suspensions when addressing student disciplinary infractions. Gregory et al. (2016) report similar findings over a three-year time span, as high schools that implemented restorative practices witnessed a 50% decrease in suspensions and a 70% reduction in classroom disruptions. These numbers demonstrate the overarching effectiveness of the use of restorative practices as a conduit of change that promotes student success. Ultimately, my findings were reported to the school's administrative team, and then disseminated to the school staff by the administration for further analysis and to discuss next steps in the evaluation process. This information was utilized to produce a broader image of student and school performance, evaluate program effectiveness, and promote accountability as staff could use this data to develop professionally.

Phase 2

I will strategically use professional development to address school needs and address any confusion or misconceptions about the use or implementation of restorative practices. According to Bambrick-Santoyo (2010), the best way for professional development to be conducted, is by anticipating initial resistance from teachers and staff until they can see how data driven decision making can improve their individual success

as well as the organizations. Therefore, bi-monthly professional development meetings will be held, with the restorative practices program at the forefront of every agenda.

During professional development, administrators will be encouraged to share peer reviewed studies on schools with similar demographics and issues with teachers. This was done to "provide greater pressure for change and begin building a collective sense of where these efforts will lead" (Wagner et al., 2016, p. 143). Continued professional development will better equip the school staff to address the socio-emotional challenges of dealing with high-risk youth as they gained a firmer grasp on how the use of restorative practices produced positively modified student behaviors; and ultimately improve academic outcomes.

Phase 3

In Phase 3, the focus is on improving academic achievement. This will be accomplished through a two-pronged approach. First, by creating a positive learning environment where students are actively engaged in their educational process; as a biproduct of positive relationships being formed with school staff using restorative language, restorative circles to build community and a non-punitive approach to handling student misbehavior. The use of restorative practices steadily led to decreases in student infractions that resulted in, in and out-of-school suspensions; See (Appendix G). According to Gregory et al. (2016), restorative circles / meetings help facilitate the creation of a learning environment where students and teachers cultivate a sense of collective empowerment and ownership, thereby re-distributing accountability to everyone in the learning environment. During restorative circles, teachers and students can collaboratively create classroom behavior expectations, class rules, and consequences

for violating those rules. In this way behaviors and articulated expectations are clear: "One of the most interesting aspects of powerful teacher-student relationships is that they are forged by behavior and words as opposed to thoughts and feelings" (Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011, p. 36). Thus, as daily restorative circles take place in every classroom, students and staff can freely communicate actionable steps towards continued positive changes. Secondly, as data reflected an increase in student attendance, I meet school leadership via phone-call, to discuss the benefits of using the small student/teacher ratios to fill gaps in student learning using small groups, and one-on-one instruction.

Phase 4

Phase 4 is to increase parental involvement. Parental involvement is crucial for students' academic and behavioral development. Therefore, restorative practices are not to be used amongst students alone as strong parent-teacher relationships is our target as well. According to my survey data, both teachers and administrators agreed that in the past, a lack of communication with parents hindered student success. Hence, it is vital that any communication barriers that previously existed between students, staff, school administrators and parents be removed. An initial back-to-school parent meeting was scheduled so the school principal and dean could communicate the school's mission, vision, and behavioral expectations to parents. Quarterly parent meetings would follow this back-to-school event, to continue to positively engage parents and solicit their input regarding student needs and how the school can work with them to produce greater academic and behavioral outcomes. This practice is in line with research findings

(Thornsborne & Blood, 2016) that indicate that a paradigm shift toward addressing student behavior must take place to positively change school climate.

Parents are our greatest allies in supporting student school behavior shifts, so positive relationships must be forged with them as well. Positive phone calls will now be implemented as a tool to share student success with parents; and weekly parent tutorial sessions have been put in place, so parents can gain assistance with how to better support classroom learning through homework help and school projects. Additionally, daily restorative circles are held with students to enhance positive communication and increase the likelihood of parents perceiving the teacher as more of an ally in their students' academic process versus an adversary. The powerful impact that these restorative circles / class meetings have on students cannot be overlooked as they are "effective in encouraging young people to think of the consequences of their actions" (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011, p. 5).

Phase 5

Phase 5 is about generating more change. The fundamental objective is to increase the effectiveness of program implementation and remedy execution to attain the established objectives. According to Kotter (2012), leadership must maintain momentum during the process of organizational change so that the sense of urgency that inspired the needed changes is not lost. Therefore, daily classroom observations and weekly data meetings are conducted to assure that the restorative practices program is being implemented with fidelity and scanned for possible areas of improvement. Daily restorative circles are being conducted to improve student/teacher communications and interactions. "Circles can merge the goals of community building and academic

achievement so that students are strengthening relationships while addressing content areas" (Costello et al., 2009, p. 27). I advised school leadership to encourage teachers towards shifting their instruction on becoming more student-centered. As an educational leader with experience teaching high-risk youth, I was able to share my experiences with allowing students to initiate class discussions. Thus, students felt empowered to lead decisions as I shifted to the role of facilitator rather than merely lecturing. Lastly, as a certified restorative practices trainer, I availed myself to the leadership of One Elementary School to provide any additional support as needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have provided a comprehensive description of the strategies required for organizational change at One Elementary School and stated Strategies and Actions (SAP), to achieve organizational goals (Appendix D). I will utilize the SAP to successfully move the subject of this study from the As-Is conceptualization (Appendix B) to the To-Be conceptualization (Appendix C). In chapter seven, I will provide a comprehensive description of a policy related to my findings and the placement of my policy within the larger educational context.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Implications and Policy Recommendations

In this chapter, I address several policy issues that are related to my findings as described in chapter four. One of the most prevalent issues identified was the lack of parent participation, which was estimated by the school's principal to be less than 20%. Prior to the 2017 school year, the school had made attempts at closing the gap that existed between parents and teachers. The principle even shared how the school collaborated with the local health department to facilitate a health fair, and even gave away gifts before a Christmas Break. The attendance for both events was great. However, the events did not yield the desired result of parents actively engaging with the school regarding student/teacher issues. Thus, student behaviors continued to be disruptive to the learning environment.

Traditionally, the school conducts a back-to-school night event, at the beginning of the school year, and four parent/teacher nights, on a per-term bases after report cards are issued. I will target the four parent/teacher nights for policy changes that alter how the school's quarterly business meetings are conducted. Currently, the school does not have any parent representation at these meetings. Thus, the school will move to identify 1-3 parent volunteers to participate in quarterly business meetings, so parents' voices are heard regarding how material, social and knowledge resources are allocated.

The second policy change is related to community involvement and student academics. My plan is to form community-based partnerships that offer free tutoring resources to both students and families. Two of the largest local churches operate after-school tutoring programs at no cost to the local community. The city also sponsors the

use of educational programs such as "Khan Academy" that assist students, grade k-12 with mathematics, science, history, grammar, and spelling at no cost to the community. The premise of this policy change is to enhance student learning, and to again promote parent participation. Reeves (2009) suggests that when change is reimagined on a more collectivistic plan, the chances of it lasting increase.

The third policy change will address parent/teacher communication. Currently, parents/guardians must adhere to several rules that are well intended but create barriers between parents/guardians and teachers being able to positively interact in for mutual purpose of seeing their students be successful. Parents are advised to wait 24-48 hours to receive a response from their students' teacher, which may be agonizing for the parent who merely needs to ask question regarding an assignment nearing a specified due date. Parents/guardians are also urged to send notes to the teacher with their children to ask or answer questions or to schedule an appointment. However, experience with varied age groups has taught me that most written correspondence never arrives to its intended destination. Therefore, I will advocate for the use of technological means of communication. My school district utilizes technological systems that can rapidly send out telephone calls, text messages and emails simultaneously. Our school also has a parent portal that is username and password sensitive, so parents/guardians can readily access student's homework, classwork, projects, and grades. Having this type of apparatus in place serves to connect the schools to families in a quick and professional manner. In addition, teachers would be required under this policy to make weekly positive phone calls to parents. This can be used as a time to update the parent on any recent progress that their student has made. It can also serve as a check-in to see if

anything the teacher can do to better support student learning. The purpose of these calls can also be to time to casually assess if there any socio-emotional needs exist in the family so the school can be alerted to that need, and an appropriate referral can be made to a community-based partner. In a public-school setting, a guidance counselor, school social worker or school phycologist would normally tackle these types of issues, but when these positions do not exist at a school, more must be done to protect the wellness of the student population.

The fourth policy that I will be advocating for is to change professional development procedures. This policy addresses the teachers. It signifies the importance on on-going professional development needing to take place to strengthen their practice as educators. I observed the responses given on my survey's and it indicated deficits in understanding of how to differentiate teaching high-risk and behavior prone students. I believe that a lack of comprehension regarding what best practices to utilize regarding the teacher's instructional approaches may have inadvertently perpetuated the poor academic and behavior outcomes of the past. It is my intent to challenge teachers to grow, develop and then apply the knowledge and tools that they gain by attending on-going professional development on a quarterly bases throughout the school year.

This policy also impacts the future implementation process of the restorative practices program at One Elementary School. Teachers and administrators can reinforce current strategies, as well as learning new ones. Further professional development can also allow teachers to positively interact with one another and build collaborative partnerships.

Policy Statement

The policy that I am recommending is that a parent representative(s) must be present at all quarterly business meetings at One Elementary School. Thornsborne and Blood (2013) suggest that one of the most effective ways to implement restorative practices is identify a team of crucial individuals who can produce change. Therefore, I am recommending this policy so parents can advocate for the needs of the students and collaboratively work with the school to fulfill those needs. Miles and Frank (2008) assert that true systemic change occurs when school leaders recognize that system-level policies should reflect solid decisions being made regarding resource allocation. Thus, this policy will increase parent participation and stakeholder involvement as budgetary decision-making becomes a collaborative process.

The second policy that I am recommending is that the school navigate towards creating healthy partnerships with community-based organizations with a vested interest in students achieving high academic success. "Available evidence shows that most public and private organizations can be significantly improved, at an acceptable cost" (Kotter, 2012, p. 19). Seeking resources that are available in the community could improve student academic outcomes at minimal or zero cost to the school's budget.

The third policy that I am recommending is that One Elementary School be required to invest in a comprehensive, student data system. Rodgers (2014) regards technological communication as an essential tool to increase active parent engagement and support. According to blog.capterra.com (2017), the median coast for this type of software is a one-time fee of $4000. Therefore, the purpose of this recommendation is so parents/guardians gain real-time access to teachers, course highlights and

communication. In, addition to this communication enhancement. Teachers will be required to reach out to parents on a weekly basis. This can be accomplished using a documented in-person or virtual meeting, telephone call or email. This policy will close the communication gaps between teachers and parents.

Lastly, the fourth policy that I am recommending is that staff training be conducted on a quarterly bases, be data-driven and focus on the application of best instructional and restorative practices. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure teacher competence and instructional execution. According to Reeves (2009), effective leaders allot teaching staff time to work in partnership. Hence, I envision the policy effectively closing gaps in teachers understanding of restorative practices; and an opportunity to learn the most relevant instructional strategies to positively alter student behavior and academic outcomes.

Analysis of Needs

In this section, I will provide an analysis of needs including consideration of the recommended policies from six distinct disciplinary areas for fuller understanding of the problems involved. Through the analysis, I will seek to make choices and trace implications. The six areas addressed and analyzed follow: Educational, Economic, Social, Political, Legal, Moral, and ethical analysis.

Educational Analysis

Education is unlike any other field in the world, as school staff have the unique honor and privilege of directly influencing the future success of society. Millions of students fill our school hallways, classrooms, lunchrooms, and common areas, acting as proverbial sponges that absorb the lessons taught to them at school. Unfortunately, all

students are not being taught the same lessons. There are students who are learning that

not all students are treated equitably as zero tolerance disciplinary policies seem to

adversely affect African American and Hispanic student more than other sub-groups.

Payne and Welch (2010) point to research that clearly documents that minority students

experience more severe punishment than their White peers. Thus, restorative methods to

school discipline are gradually being utilized to decrease dependence on suspension and

eliminate the gap in racial discipline. "Educational leaders must be able to create

environments where students know they are valued and respected" (Thornsborne et al.,

2013, p. 113).

Therefore, for the restorative practices program to establish deep roots within the

culture of a school, transparency must exist between the school and the community that it

serves. Hence, the rationale behind the policy recommendation for parents to have

representation at the school's quarterly business meetings. These meetings will support a

collaborative partnership being formed as parents become intimately involved with the

inner workings of the school and are grafted into the decision-making processes. The

success of the restorative practices program "involves community shareholders accepting

greater responsibility clarifying how they must adapt their roles to support their students

effectively" (Kegan & Wagner, 2006, p. 134).

Restorative practices focus on reaching the whole student. Meaning, that many

might assume that these strategies only center around behavior management; but they

would be incorrect. Restorative practices seek to construct an educational environment of

inclusivity, collaboration, communication, and high academic expectations. Mallett

(2016) asserts that Restorative Practices program elements implemented at schools often

contain collaborative teaching strategies, group discussions, mentoring and strong family involvement. Therefore, supporting solid connections with parent/guardians is included in the process of altering school culture and assuring effective implementation. Thus, my policy recommendation for a comprehensive student data system being put in place, will directly link parents to the learning environment to support high student achievement and engagement.

To support the learning of all students, I am recommending data-driven training for staff be conducted on a quarterly basis. Enhancing instruction is paramount. Wagner and Kegan (2006) contend that educators need to be provided regular information regarding who they can improve their instructional delivery to meet academic goals. Thus, the overarching focus of these trainings will emphasize best instructional practices, restorative practices implementation and areas for growth.

Economic Analysis

According to Vo (2012), it cost roughly $10,615 per year to send a student to school. However, in 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons reflected a number greater than three times that amount to house an inmate for one year (Vo, 2012). These numbers are important because they illustrate the growing economic impact that punitive disciplinary policies have on the increased number over arrests taking place on our school campuses around the nation. As an educational leader, I have experienced the horrifying threat of a student bringing an illegal weapon onto the school campus; and was fortunate enough to see the situation defused by law enforcement. However, I have also witnessed many more incidences that could have been defused and addressed at the school-level, result in the arrest and detainment of Black and Hispanic students. Instances like these are what has

been commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. "In 2010, over 2.1 million young people under the age of 18 were arrested, leading to the juvenile courts handling of almost 1.3 million delinquency cases involving youthful offenders charged with criminal offenses" (Mallet, 2016, p. 1). These numbers are synonymous with the ever-increasing number of students that instead of graduating from high school, graduate to committing other criminal offences that eventually land them in prison as adults. It is imperative that all school leaders understand that early interventions can be enacted now amongst our student populations that will minimize the cost to society by incarcerating system hardened adults in the future.

Based on the number of students at One Elementary School that receive government scholarships, annual donations, and corporate sponsors, the principal gave me an estimated amount of $2,100,000 to operate the school. The principal also stated that a local bank has agreed to also sponsor the school, which will add an additional $7000 to the annual budget as well. Additionally, the principal stated that the new funding source, when coupled with donations should sufficiently cover the cost of on-going professional development and technology upgrades at the school.

Social Analysis

Restorative practices embody a positive move towards empowering students to learn how to positively communicate with others, resolve conflict, learn self-monitoring skills to manage their own behavior, and empathetically connect with others. Curative school culture is community focused, recognizing that positive relationships are critical for education to occur in learning environments so that conflict can be appropriately addressed, and damaged relationships repaired. Restorative practices bolster the

socioemotional capacity of our students. During my time as a restorative practices trainer, I have witnessed students that were once at heightened points of anger and disagreements participate in a restorative circle and work out their differences. Hence, staff that are well trained in the use of these strategies, can help deescalate conflicts within the school community; modeling how to appropriately handle conflict without violence. Kaveney and Drewery (2011) affirm that restorative practices improve student's perception of how their behavior impacts others, improves social communication, and promotes personal accountability. These attributes, along with many others, teach students how to function as productive members of a larger school-community.

Political Analysis

A recent staff meeting at my school was regarded by many teachers as the best meeting of the year. This can be attributed to the fact that almost half of the teachers felt free to share what they feel is wrong with the educational system. Teachers shared ideas and were affirmed by their peers without fear of administrative retribution. In, the past, teachers kept their comments or criticisms to a minimum because disagreeing with administrators was thought to be something that could harm a teachers performance evaluation. I personally found this type of forum refreshing and inciteful. However, as one of my colleagues and I were sent into a Zoom breakout room and the dialogue continued, I mentioned that as good as our ideas were, our remedies would never become a reality without changes in education policy. According to Simson (2014), zero tolerance policies counterintuitively impact the learning environment. For this reason, educational leaders need to continuously revisit policies that impact the learning environment.

Increasing support for the use of s requires a broad-centered education movement. Given the political rhetoric permeating society, restorative practices advocates have a formidable task to surmount the political opposition to change. Restorative practices can serve as a palatable option for political conservatives and political liberals alike, as they stress personal accountability and community-building. Therefore, restorative practices advocates should engage the community directly. Subsequently, community engagement serves a vital role in the successful implementation of restorative practices. Parents and stakeholders should not be looked upon as advocates for their students alone, but potential advocates of the good that they see produced from the schools that support, teach, and love their children.

Legal Analysis

Restorative practices intertwine various disciplines that highlight some of the best strategies utilized for organizational improvement. By leveraging social capital, school leaders can employ these practices to promote civility, reduce criminal activity and deter on-campus violence. "Laws and leaders are supposed to protect groups of people, mediate disputes and maintain order. As a microcosm of society, a school also needs rules and leaders who will carry out those functions" (Costello et al., 2009, p. 49).

Moral and Ethical Analysis

Schools must strive to address the humanistic needs of the students that they serve. Things such as safety, security, respect, and the need to feel valued are ways in which people come to understand the meaning of community. According to Buckmaster (2016), school leaders should model care, compassion, and empathy for the purpose of developing the school community. Therefore, reforming punitive disciplinary polices that

are counterintuitive to the process of community-building is our moral and ethical responsibility as leaders who are working in the best interest of our students.

Ellemers, Toorn, Paunov, and Leeuwen (2019) suggest that morality reveals the complexities of right and wrong behavior as all people have the propensity to make poor life choices. In schools, students are faced with multiple moral and ethical dilemmas that require critical thinking and problem-solving skills that we assume they have when they enter our facilities. However, any diverse number of factors could directly or indirectly impede a student's ability to make the best choices. Therefore, I caution school leaders to not project their world views, and life-understanding onto the proverbial backs of immature children who just happen to also be our students.

The use of restorative practices promotes equity and fairness within our schools. This approach serves to counteract the punitive disciplinary policies that have disproportionately affected African American and Hispanic students, that have traditionally resulted in more suspensions, expulsions, and arrests. "American society should be extremely critical of school discipline policies that impede its youth's academic potential, criminalize its children and waste enormous amounts of social and economic resources" (Simson, 2014, p. 522).

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

Given the policy for which I am advocating, the implication for staff relationships is crucial to their welfare and execution of their duties. As employees actively engage in professional development activities, they gain the opportunity to exchange professional skills, academic resources and communicate ideas that will impact instructional delivery and improve staff interpersonal relationships. "In the midst of action, you have to be able

to reflect on your own attitudes and behavior to better calibrate your interventions into the complex dynamics of organizations and communities" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 6). Additionally, as thorough data analysis takes place, a greater level of importance can be placed upon specific areas where re-teaching is necessary and reducing student misconception within the curriculum. Ultimately, leaders are responsible for cultivating a work environment where staff are empowered to carry out the organizations vision and mission. Kotter (2012) mirrors this thought when he states that leadership should empower staff by eliminating as many obstructions to the execution of the organizational vision as possible.

The implications for community relationships are the fostering of trust, accountability, and collaboration. Restorative schools safeguard both the school and the larger outside communities by teaching students the tools necessary to be a great citizen. These practices are then reinforced as schools seek to connect with parents and stakeholders to solicit their assistance with nurturing the growth of is most valuable resources, its children.

The other stakeholder relationships that garner my consideration is the city-government and the community-based organizations who have been longstanding proponents of schools working in the best interest of minority students. As these relationships are forged, this will enable all those with a vested interest in the long-term success of our students to work harmoniously together. Local government must be considered as valued stakeholders; primarily because the students that we now educate, stand to become the future workers, taxpayers, and voters of the future. Thus, leveraging

these relationships to gain access to valuable resources and ideas can assuredly be utilized to build organizational capacity for the betterment of students.

As an education leader, I have participated in community meetings that centered around rooting out racially discriminatory policies and practices that disproportionately affect African American and Hispanic students. The leadership at these meetings were well acquainted with the schools within the community, and they were both data-driven and solution focused. Therefore, as One Elementary School seeks to create an inclusive educational environment, it would be incumbent of school leadership to include these community-based partners in the implementation process so a clear distinction can be made between the efforts to facilitate change at One Elementary School and other educational institutions.

The implications for those relationships are the school receiving the support needed to facilitate lasting change. Thornsborne et al. (2013) suggests that positive school climates are created as when schools effectively collaborate with stakeholders. Thus, the need to improve the school's communication methods, business practices and the approach of how teacher professional development is best applied, will be used to build collaborative partnerships that strive to do what is in the best interest of students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my policy approaches are meant to enhance the implementation process of the restorative practices program at One Elementary School. I am confident that these policies will effectively address the school needs identified within the earlier chapters within this study. In chapter eight of this program evaluation, I will synthesize my program evaluation, the organizational plan, and policy advocacy components of my

dissertation. In addition, I will also share some reflective thoughts on the many leadership

lessons that I learned throughout this process.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

The goal of my research was to study the effects of the restorative practices program at One Elementary School. During previous years, the school struggled severely with terrible student behavior issues. On various occasions, student behaviors resulted in, multiple in-and-out of school suspensions. The administration found themselves utterly frustrated and began searching for answers to address the significant behavior problems. A similar search to reconcile these types of issues can be found in Fronius et al. (2016), as a multitude of schools and school districts are mentioned as trying to alleviate their current reliance on the traditional punitive methods of dealing with misbehaving students. Schools have embraced a range of options and methods beneath the restorative practices canopy. These methods range from positive restorative conversation techniques to formal parent conferencing. Therefore, like many other schools, with similar student-demographics and issues to confront and overcome, the decision was made to turn to the use of restorative practices.

The use of restorative practices is meant to serve more than just student behavior. These methods have also been used to restructure the learning environment so student academic needs can be better addressed. "This shift is evidenced in the classroom setting when educators seek to create a sense of community ownership among students" (Fronius et al., 2016, p. 6). Given the strong evidence that restorative practices are recognized as effective, it supports as a projection that continued improvements will be seen at One Elementary School.

Reeves (2009) emphasizes the need for school leaders "to focus on the key factors that we can directly influence" (p. 61). Hence, school leadership, whose role directly influences the outcomes of what students encounter within the classrooms should aim to create a school climate of relationship and positivity. The expectation is that as restorative practices become the norm of all staff, the school's capacity to build a healthier school community/learning environment is greatly increased.

Educators have become more cognizant of the reality that punitive disciplinary approaches such as suspensions and detention, only exacerbate problems such as school violence, bullying and poor academic performance. Thus, educators are now being provoked to explore restorative practices as a viable means of producing much needed change. Progressive discipline fits within the vein of restorative practices by teaching students desirable character traits as a means of behavior modification. It involves community building by making parents and teachers an integral part of the disciplinary process. Lastly, progressive discipline creates room for students to be restored to the learning environment after harm has been done through the enacting of positive behavior supports to reduce recidivism.

What was demonstrated at One Elementary School between the 2017-2020 school years, is that the implementation of Restorative Practices positively affected the entire school landscape. Behavior data reflected a 46% decrease in referrals from 2017-2020. The decrease in behavior referrals led to less in-and-out of school suspensions, which ultimately increased the amount of time that students had to engage in classroom instruction. Annual attendance rates improved 11% between 2017-2020 as well. This evolved into academic data showing a 6% increase in mathematics proficiency and a 24%

increase in reading proficiency by the end of the third year of implementation.
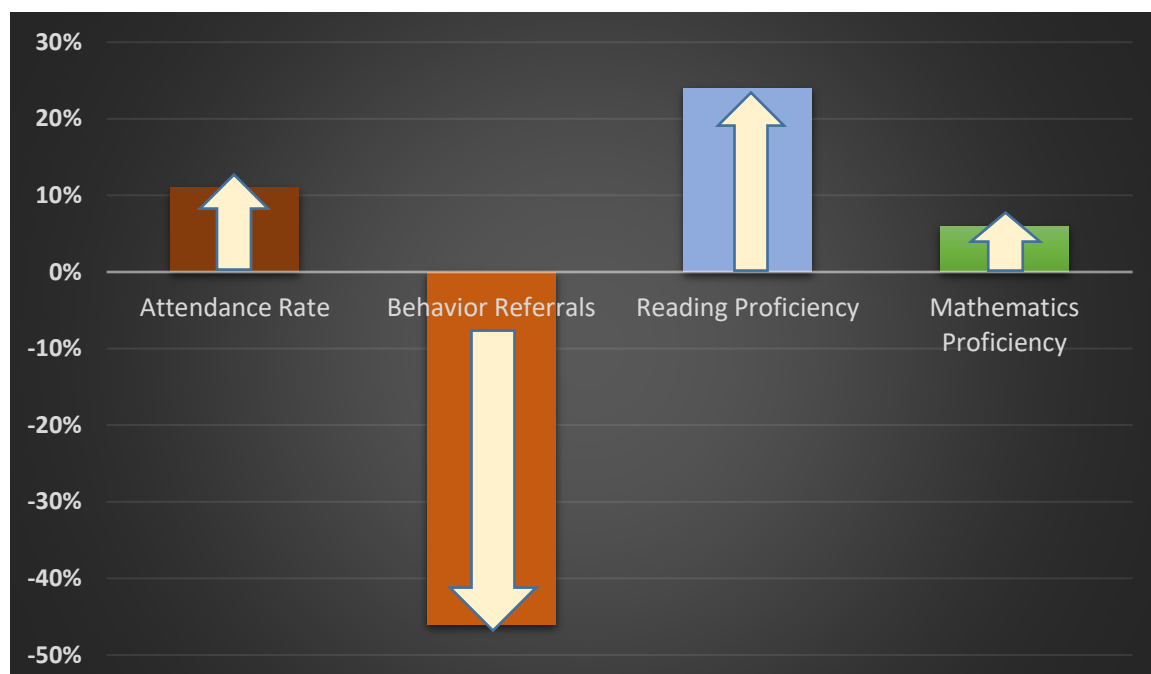
Figure 5. Trends after Three Year Implementation of Restorative Practices at One Elementary School between the years 2017-2020 (Data source: school level and school district data)

Discussion

      A synthesis of the program evaluation determined that the restorative practices program at One Elementary School was indeed affective. The data gathered, affirmed the usefulness of restorative practices in addressing the school's concerns, student behavior, low attendance rates and poor academic performance. As previously stated within this chapter, between the 2017-2020 school year, behavior data reflect a combined 46% decrease in student behavior referrals, an 11% increase in the annual attendance rates and a significant increase in academic gains. My goal was to demonstrate the efficacy of restorative practices, specifically amongst African American youth from urban communities despite their multiple accompanying risk factors.

My organizational change plan addressed the issues raised by the program evaluation through careful data collection, analysis, interpretation, and action planning. This information was used to build staff buy-in regarding the usefulness of restorative practices. Secondly, I sought to maximize the teaching and learning experience of the students to improve academic outcomes. Next, my goal was to increase parent involvement to promote student success. Lastly, my recommendations focused on generating more change so that program fidelity is insured and the positive results to last.

The policy changes that I am advocating for address issues raised within my program evaluation and organizational change plan. This is accomplished by requiring the continued use of restorative practices to address student behavior, academics, and student attendance issues. The first policy advocates for parent representation to be present at all of the school's quarterly business meetings so parents 'thoughts and ideas are shared concerning how school resources are allocated. The second policy encourages the school to create collaborative partnerships with community-based organizations to increase student achievement. The third policy change will address parent/teacher communication through the school acquiring a technological data system to connect the schools to families to the classroom environment in real time. In addition, teachers would be obliged to verbally communicate with parents on a weekly basis. Current student teacher ratios make this a feasible task. The fourth and final policy that I will be advocating for is to change staff training procedures. This policy addresses professional development issues that close gaps in the use and implementation of restorative practices, behavior management and best instructional practices. Administrators will monitor this communication using the schools online call-logs.

The implementation of restorative practices must be done with the objective of all staff, students and stakeholders embracing restorative practices until they become a permanent part of the school's culture. Teachers must allow their instruction to become more student centered. This strategy will empower students to take responsibility for their educational process, improve critical thinking skills and promote on-going communication development. In addition to parents having the opportunity to attend regular meetings, such as tutorial sessions, they will also be invited to quarterly business meetings, so their input can help guide the allocation of school resources to best meet student needs.

Leadership Lessons

One of the most powerful leadership lessons that I have learned during this process is that organizational change must be supported by data. During this process, I continued to place emphasis on the importance of analyzing the school's data, and then articulating my findings to school leadership. I also encouraged school leadership team to share these finding with all their staff members. What took place next was incredible. Once staff members could see and understand the data for themselves, they became more embracive of the need to change the organizations former disciplinary approach. One staff member admitted during a Zoom meeting, that they did not understand why the administrators where changing things originally; so, they begrudgingly began the process of restorative practices implementation with doubts that they would even work. This taught me the importance of transparency, and how a lack of transparency will affect stakeholder buy-in. Therefore, "a commitment to clear and public displays of data must be in place so that results of the change can be widely shared, reinforcing the

commitment and hard work of every person contributing to the change effort" (Reeves, 2009, p. 34).

I also learned that if I allow the school environment to become toxic, I should expect that my organizational outcomes to reflect toxicity. The school leader must intentionally set out to create a "learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, and high teacher expectations for teachers and students" (Hattie, 2012, p. 83). Hence, my desire to use restorative practices within the urban learning environment has been affirmed by my research, because creating a sense of community and positive school culture are my goals as an educational leader. This premise lays the foundations of great teaching and learning. Reeves (2009) asserts that the schools and organizations experience more lasting change when they begin with modifying the culture.

The importance of communication is also a vital leadership lesson that I have learned. This became actualized for me during the creation of a change plan (Appendix D). The need to successfully articulate the action steps necessary for materializing my organizational goals was paramount to implementational success. When there is a lack of clear communication, the greatest strategies and plans are left to chance. Leaders must remain intentional about communicating the organizational vision, mission, and action steps necessary to achieve goals. Combined with a data-based rationale that clarifies the vision, mission, and action steps, transformational growth becomes anchored to every aspect of the school's culture.

I have grown as a leader by learning the art of resilience. My journey throughout my doctoral program has been challenging to say the least. I was tested by being faced

with the loss of loved ones, by enduring professional setbacks, by physical illnesses, various family issues, bouts of self-doubt and depression, and living and surviving in a world facing a global Corona Virus pandemic. My ability to maintain resilience has established a core of strength that has endowed me with the courage, wisdom, and resolve to lead others.

My expectation is that the information and knowledge generated by this study will assist educational leaders to impact the lives of African American and Hispanic students across the United States of America. My goal is to empower these students by helping them make connections with their schools; that these connections will inspire them to excel beyond the achievement limitations tacitly or overtly pronounced about them as youth who are growing up under poor socioeconomics conditions. Thus, I am committed to continue to communicate my findings and to advocate the use of restorative practices to school leaders and educational practitioners with a particular urgency for urban schools with high minority populations.

Conclusion

As I reflect on the leadership lessons that I have learned throughout this process, the three that resonate the most are: using data to make decisions, understanding the effects of leadership on the learning environment and the value of effective communication. All three of these leadership lessons are important pieces of what makes restorative practices effective. Data analysis informs the implementation process. It provides clearer understanding of organizational needs, uncovers useful information, informs logical conclusions, and supports efficient decision-making. Changing school culture cannot begin nor end with assumptions. Facts must be considered so that all

interventions can become targeted. Secondly, assuming a leadership role means assuming

the success or failure of an organization. School leaders shape the learning environment

through their actions. After many years in the field of education, the leaders that I most

admired demonstrated that they truly valued the students being served and the staff they

supervised. Therefore, while communication plays a vital role in gaining buy-in from

students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders, a leader's resilience when challenges

arise and how they implement what was spoken is of themselves, has a greater impact

than words alone. "The single greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the

gap between what leaders say they value and what leaders actually value" (Reeves, 2009,

p. 37).

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Appendices

Appendix A. Administrator/Teacher Survey

Appendix B. "As Is" 4 C's Analysis for One Elementary School

Appendix C. "To Be" 4 C's Analysis for One Elementary School

Appendix D. Strategy and Action Chart

Appendix A

Administrator/ Teacher Survey

Question 1.
What is your job title? Please check your response below.

☐ Teacher   ☐ Administrator

Question 2.
How many years have you worked in education? Please check your response below.

☐ 1 – 3 years   ☐ 4 – 8 years   ☐ 9 – 15 years 16 +   ☐ years

Question 3.
What do you feel is working well with the use of Restorative Practices among your African American students at One Elementary School?

Question 4.
What do you feel is not working well with the use of Restorative Practices among your African American students at One Elementary School?

Question 5.
How likely is it that you would recommend the use of Restorative Practices to a friend or colleague? Please circle a number to indicate your level of agreement.

Not at all likely	Likely	Extremely likely

Question 6.
Do you have any other comments, or concerns?

Appendix B

"As Is" 4 C's Analysis for One Elementary School

Context

- Religious based educational program (Private School)
- At-risk student population
- Poor Parent Partiipation.

Culture

- Historically punitive disciplinary approach
- No clear professional development strategy
- Teachers distrust of parental follow-up.

Lack of strong student/teacher relationships for the development of established safe and secure learning environment that encourages success of all learners and promotes high job satisfaction amongst teachers.

Conditions

- Class sizes small enough for individualized instruction
- Funding for professional development is limited.
- Facility has limited space and technological access for students.
- An overwhelming number of students have learning difficulties and socio-emotional challenges.

Competencies

- Teachers lack skills in teaching an ESE (Exceptional Student Education) population. Therefore, the behaviors demonstrated by the students originally overwhelmed teachers.
- Teachers understanding of restorative practices is limited.

Appendix C

"To Be" 4 C's Analysis for One Elementary School

Context

- Religious based educational program (Private School)
- At-risk student population
- Historically low academic achievement

Culture

- Restorative learning environment built: Communication, Trust, Respect & Accountability
- Clear professional development strategy
- Improved parent and community involvement.

Conditions

- Small class sizes are used to increase individualized instruction and close student learning gaps.
- Relationships are built to local businesses to provide additional resources for students, teachers, and facilities management.
- On-going professional development to equip staff to address the socio-emotional challenges of dealing with high-risk youth

Restorative practices are being used to improve student/staff relationships that led to the development of a safe and secure learning environment that encourages all learners' success and promotes high job satisfaction amongst teachers.

Competencies

- Good at communication.
- Able to identify student needs.
- Interacting well with students and parents.
- Able to use best practices and other appropriate teaching strategies.

Appendix D

Strategy and Actions Chart

Strategy: Five Phase Plan	Actions
Phase 1 **Data Collection, Analysis, Interpretation and Action Planning**	Informed decision making. • Qualitative data collected on administrators and instructional staff using surveys. • Quantitative data analysis of the: attendance, behavior, and academic school data from the 2017-2019 school years. • Disclose my findings to the school administrators. • Use the data to create an actionable plan of how One Elementary School, can improve program effectiveness, promote accountability and, most importantly, ensure student success.
Phase 2 **Building Buy-In**	Strategically use professional development to address school needs. • Address confusion or misconceptions about Restorative Practices. • Present the pre-and post-data of schools that have used restorative practices with similar student populations. • Equip staff to address the socio-emotional challenges of dealing with high-risk youth.
Phase 3 **Maximize the teaching and learning experience**	To improve academic achievement, student attendance must improve, and teachers must utilize current student teacher ratios to their advantage. • Decrease in-and-out of school suspensions. • Improve student/teacher relationships through restorative speech and de-escalation strategies. • Increase the use of small group and one-on-one instruction.

Phase 4 **Increase parent involvement**	Parental involvement is crucial for students' academic and behavioral development. • Principal and dean communicate the school's mission, vision, and behavioral expectations. • Positive phone calls will be used to share student success with parents and open the lines of communication. • Implementation of weekly tutorial sessions where students' and parents can gain assistance with homework and school projects. • Daily restorative circles held with students to enhance positive communication and increase the likelihood of parents perceiving the teacher as more of an ally in their students' academic process versus an adversary.
Phase 5 **Generating More Change**	Daily classroom observations and weekly data meetings are conducted to assure that the restorative practices program is being implemented with fidelity and scanned for possible areas of improvement. • Daily restorative circles are being conducted to improve student/teacher communications and interactions. • Instruction shifts towards becoming a student-centered learning environment where students initiate class discussions, and the teacher serves more as a facilitator. • Students are empowered to make decisions. • As a certified restorative practices trainer, I have availed myself to the leadership of One Elementary School to provide any additional support.