Designing Professional Development in Restorative Practices: Assessing High School Personnel's, Students', and Parents' Perceptions of Discipline Practices

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Abstract

We conducted focus groups with high school staff, students, parents and administrators to gain information about how to design professional development training supporting high school staff in implementing restorative practices within a multi-tiered support system. Results indicated that all stakeholders valued trust and relationship building, and identified equity, accountability, and home-school communications as key elements of effective discipline approaches. We provide recommendations for designing professional development for high school staff in effectively and sustainably integrating restorative practices with existing multi-tiered student support systems.

Keywords: Restorative practices, high schools, professional development, implementation

Designing Professional Development in Restorative Practices: Assessing High School Personnel's, Students', and Parents' Perceptions of Discipline Practices

Restorative practices (RP) in schools are gaining in popularity. Many districts across the country look towards RP as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline, and as a potential remedy for racial disparities in disciplinary exclusions (Fronius et al., 2019). The popular appeal of RP in schools seems to have outpaced research systematically building evidence of (a) how restorative practices align with current discipline approaches, (b) how they can be sustainably integrated with currently implemented discipline systems, and (c) how successful implementation should be measured.

In this context, our work focuses on designing professional development materials to guide teachers in effectively, efficiently and sustainably integrating RP with existing multi-tiered support systems (MTSS). One widely implemented MTSS is School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS). Firmly rooted in behavioral science, the basic premises of SWPBIS are to (a) proactively teach what appropriate behaviors look like, (b) consistently and predictably reinforce appropriate behaviors and (b) consistently and predictably discourage inappropriate behaviors through a continuum of consequences. Consistent and predictable reinforcement is intended to contribute to the norming of appropriate behaviors and an overall prosocial school culture (Horner & Sugai, 2015). To facilitate efficient implementation of these practices, SWPBIS tailors them to the needs of individual students through a multi-tiered support system. Universal support in the form of proactive teaching and acknowledgement of appropriate behavior is provided to all students; secondary support in the form of more frequent lessons and reminders of what appropriate behavior looks like and more frequent reinforcement is provided to those students who remain insufficiently responsive to universal support; and tertiary support

in the form of individualized behavior support plans is provided to a small number of students with the most intense support needs (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). The logic of MTSS is to maximize support to all students through efficient allocation of resources based on student need. The effectiveness of SWPBIS is commonly measured in reductions in office discipline referrals (ODR), a teacher-generated measure of student behavior (Irvin et al., 2004). While there is emphasis on culturally responsive use of SWPBIS practices (Leverson et al., 2016), to date, SWPBIS has had mixed impact on reducing race and gender disparities in behavioral outcomes (McIntosh, et al., 2018; Vincent et al, 2012; 2015).

Implementation of SWPBIS tends to be adult driven, with staff representatives defining appropriate behaviors, reinforcements and acknowledgement systems, and consequences. At the same time, successful implementation and outcomes for SWPBIS have been greater at the elementary than at the middle or high school level (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Noltemeyer, et al., 2019). Research suggests that implementation in high schools has been challenging due to high schools' focus on academic rather than social competence, students' self-management expectations, and adolescent students' desire for independence from adults and autonomous decision-making (Flannery et al., 2013; Hafen et al., 2012; Syvertson et al., 2009).

Given these limitations of SWPBIS, we theorize that RP might be able to strengthen SWPBIS, or other MTSS, especially at the high school level. In general, RP emphasizes building and re-building relationships between teachers and students and among peers. Restoring relationships after harm has occurred is seen as a necessary step to facilitate students' continued social-emotional growth and academic success (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Kidde & Alfred, 2011). As such, RP differentiates itself from traditional school disciplinary practices that focus on managing student behavior. It is a reorientation away from violations of

behavioral expectations and associated punitive consequences towards recognizing and learning from the impact one's behavior has on oneself, others, and the school community. This reorientation requires all members of a school community to re-think their roles, goals, and relationships with each other. There is growing evidence of the benefits of RP to improving relationships between students and staff (Gregory et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2014; Kane et al., 2008; McMorris et al., 2013; Ortega et al., 2016; Skinns et al., 2009; Vaandering 2013) and reducing racial-ethnic disparities in exclusionary discipline (Augustine et al., 2018; Gonzales & Gonzales, 2012; Gregory et al., 2016; Gregory & Evans, 2020; Payne & Welch, 2010; Simson, 2013; Vincent et al., 2016). At times, RP seems to be primarily understood as an alternative to disciplinary exclusions (Buckmaster, 2016). Our efforts focus on integrating RP into existing multi-tiered discipline systems.

Conceptual Background for the Current Study

As a first step in our effort to design professional development materials to guide teachers in effectively, efficiently and sustainably integrating RP with existing multi-tiered support systems (MTSS), such as SWPBIS, we wanted to talk with high school personnel, students, and parents in schools that implemented SWPBIS and/or RP. Their experiences with their school's discipline practices, and how they felt restorative practices might be effectively, efficiently, and sustainably implemented given their current discipline approaches would be critical to designing effective professional development to promote systematic and sustainable integration of RP along a multi-tiered continuum. Seeking stakeholder input follows the recommendations of implementation science and teacher training development to intentionally study the factors that promote the adoption, application, and sustainability of evidence-based interventions (Fixsen et al., 2015; Glasgow et al., 1999; Hunzicker, 2011). A core concern of implementation science

involves methods that stimulate the diffusion of evidence-based innovations. These include ensuring that innovations align with the perceived needs, values, and beliefs of stakeholders and that practices are (a) communicated by professionals, (b) adopted and implemented by natural change agents (e.g., teachers), and (c) fit within existing systems sustained over time within social systems (Rogers, 2003). Implementation science also emphasizes relationships between partners in systems, such as students, parents, and school personnel (Fixen et al., 2015).

Methods

During this initial formative research phase of our development project, we conducted focus groups with key stakeholders. Focus groups offer a qualitative formative evaluation method capable of providing frank, open-ended perspectives on the contextual variables that affect stakeholders' perspectives. Properly facilitated focus groups with representative high school teachers and other school personnel (e.g., school counselors), high school students, and parents of high school students allow an impartial exploration of these stakeholders' attitudes and experiences and offer "street-level" depth on key aspects of our proposed professional development focused on blending RP with existing MTSS (Cho & Lee, 2014; Palinkas, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2011). Overall, our formative work was guided by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), which utilizes a systematic and iterative approach to collecting and analyzing qualitative data and developing theory.

Our study was driven by these research questions:

1. What does your school currently do to implement discipline practices (SWPBIS or RP)? What works well and what is challenging?

2. What might facilitate sustainable implementation of RP given your current discipline practices?

Participants

Upon receiving IRB approval in November 2017, the research team worked with school administrators of high schools in the Pacific Northwest that self-reported implementing SWPBIS and/or RP to recruit students, school personnel, and parent participants. Focus group participants received a monetary incentive for participating. To accommodate participants' availability, we conducted seven focus groups with students, school personnel, and parents, and an additional focus group with administrators, for a total of 40 participants across eight groups. Students, school personnel, and parents came from 4 high schools. Table 1 provides an overview of the participating schools' overall demographics. Two of these schools implemented SWPBIS and RP, one implemented SWPBIS and was beginning to implement RP, and one implemented SWPBIS only. In three schools, Latinx students were the largest minority group; in one school multiracial students were the largest minority group. The administrators represented two school districts in the Pacific Northwest. One district was an urban mid-sized district serving a total of 5,560 students in 11 schools, and the other district was an urban mid-sized district serving a total of 17,331 students in 38 schools. One district implemented SWPBIS only, and one implemented SWPBIS and was beginning to implement RP. All focus groups were conducted between January and November of 2018. We first met with school personnel (three groups), students (two groups), and parents (two groups). To get more information about how to introduce RP into school systems, we convened an additional focus group with district-level administrators. Table 2 provides an overview of participants' demographic characteristics. School personnel's job titles included general education teacher, special education teacher, counselor, resource officer, Restorative Justice specialist, student manager, program director, admissions counselor, and administrator.

Procedures

Each focus group was held at a location that was most convenient for participants. In nearly all cases, groups met at the schools either in person, or involving video conferencing to bridge geographic distances among participants. The group of administrators convened at the University of Oregon. Each group took approximately two hours and began with ensuring that all participants provided their own informed consent and, in the case of students, parental consent. Following the completion of informed consent, participants were asked to respond to a demographics questionnaire before participating in the discussion.

Each focus group had a facilitator and a note-taker. The facilitator reminded participants to keep information shared in the focus group confidential, i.e. not to share it with individuals outside of the focus group. The facilitator followed a semi-structured guide consisting of questions probing participants' current experiences with their school's discipline practices and experiences with or opinions of implementing RP. Table 3 provides an overview of the questions. Facilitators took care to follow up on comments regarding priority areas related to school discipline and positive behavior supports for students, both formal (i.e., SWPBIS) and informal. We designed the questions to guide the research but not to be static or confining (Glaser, 1992). For example, personnel in schools already implementing restorative practices were asked to provide specific examples of experiences in their school that led to greater staff and/or student buy-in and to describe unintended negative consequences of RP implementation. Students were asked to describe what happens if a student violates behavioral expectations, what consequences existed and if they were fair for all students. To make sure that all participants understood the meaning of SWPBIS and RP, the facilitator provided broad definitions of those terms as necessary during the discussion. We defined the key elements of SWPBIS as (a)

positively defined school-wide behavioral expectations (b) consistent acknowledgement of students who follow the expectations, and (c) consistent consequences for students who do not. We defined the key elements of RP as (a) focusing on impact of behavior rather than rule violations, (b) building and repairing relationships, and (c) promoting behavioral accountability. To protect participants' identities, we asked each person to choose a pseudonym they would use throughout the discussion. Students chose names of candies (e.g., Gummy bear, M&M, Kit Kat), teachers chose animals and colors, and parents chose cars and candies.

In addition to notes taken by the notetaker, all focus groups were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed with participants identified by their self-chosen pseudonyms. Transcriptions were given to the data analysis team for coding and analysis.

Analytical Procedures

Transcripts were analyzed for content using Grounded Theory methods (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This allowed the research team to explicate implicit meanings, crystallize the significance of points, compare data, and identify gaps in the data (Charmaz, 2006). To ensure the validity of our qualitative findings, we engaged in a five-step iterative process of data analysis including: (a) open coding of focus group transcripts by two researchers and organization of identified codes into a coding framework; (b) selective coding and re-review of transcripts using the developed coding framework as a guide to identify any content we may inadvertently have missed and adjust our coding scheme as needed; (c) "memoing" by researchers to link theory to ideas presented in the transcripts and codes; (d) code cross-checking of thematic findings by a third researcher to validate and deepen data interpretations; and (e) documentation of our procedures. Following this process, two members of our three-person analysis team first independently performed open coding of eight focus group transcripts,

meaning we carefully reviewed each line of the interview transcripts and identified common themes or categories (Charmaz, 2006). The two members then met to compare codes and to develop a preliminary organization of these codes. All three members of the data analysis team then collectively organized the codes into two overarching categories: "Content" and "Delivery." Evidence that we achieved theoretical saturation came from finding that our participants in later focus groups, for the most part, echoed observations of earlier focus group participants.

Following open coding, we engaged in a brief selective coding process in which we reviewed the transcripts through the lens of our coding schema to identify any content we may have inadvertently missed during our first review of transcripts. We assigned additional content either to one of our codes or, if a code did not yet exist, we added to and adapted our coding scheme as needed. For instance, upon our re-review of the transcripts, we discovered that our coding scheme did not reflect several quotes from students and teachers addressing the importance of school leaders' self-reflection on inequitable impacts of school policies and typical practices.

We then created memos (i.e., comments) regarding theory as we continued to organize and refine our categories. Interview transcripts were re-analyzed during this step to further document the emerging theory of RP implementation in schools, as well as to clarify categories related to how best to implement effective discipline practices.

Next, the third member of our data analysis team engaged in code cross-checking of thematic findings, which allowed us to cross-validate each other's data interpretations and enhance our awareness of diverse meanings of participants' observations. Finally, documentation of our step-by-step process of the data collection and analysis procedures were maintained

throughout the study in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Results

We present our findings by the primary categories of the theoretical framework that emerged based on our coding, namely "Content" or focus of current discipline practices and "Delivery" of RP. Results for each primary category are organized by the codes we identified in our coding framework. For each code, we provide results from school personnel, students, and parents.

Current Discipline Practices: What Works, What is Challenging

In responses to research question 1 (What does your school currently do to implement discipline practices (SWPBIS or RP)? What works well and what is challenging?) participants spoke about the following key components of their current discipline practices: (a) establishing trust, (b) building and maintaining relationships, (c) negotiating constraints to trust and relationship building, (d) promoting equity, (e) promoting accountability, and (f) engaging in school-parent communication.

Establishing trust. All focus group participants talked about trust as the essential ingredient of any discipline system. School personnel acknowledged that trust between students and school adults must be earned and cannot be taken for granted. One participant said: "...a lot of our students don't really trust adults, and so we have to build up that trust with them. And once we establish trust, then we can start to make progress with the students" (Group C). A non-teaching staff member from the same school said "The kids tend to trust us more because we are walking around constantly within the school and [are] available to them. And they come out and

will tell their whole life story to us" (Group C). One school personnel from a school

implementing RP stated:

> Whether it's hey, I think somebody has been using, or hey, somebody has been talking
>
> about self-harm or whatever it is, I think they just feel like the process not being as
>
> punitive, they can trust a little more that we're actually going to try to help them than just
>
> refer them to a probation officer. (Group A)

Students emphasized the reciprocity of establishing trust. School staff need to prove

themselves trustworthy to students in the same way students need to prove themselves

trustworthy to school staff and peers. One student was succinct: "Trust no one" (Group E).

Another student recalled how a counselor lost her trust:

> I went in her office once and I told her about something. It wasn't even life-threatening or
>
> harmful to me, the community, or anybody else, but she went straight to my parents. […]
>
> And when she did that, I felt like she wasn't trustworthy anymore. So, I never went and
>
> saw her ever again. I don't trust counselors. (Group D)

Trust was identified as a key ingredient to sharing, as well as not sharing, information.

One student explained:

> So, in some senses, I think that they [another student] should tell somebody, but they
>
> should wait. They should because what's the point of talking to somebody you trust when
>
> you know that they're going to go and talk to somebody about it if they're concerned.
>
> (Group D)

Parents shared the importance of trust, but were less sure about their ability to trust or not

trust all school personnel. One parent remarked: "And I do trust […] the principal, or the vice

principals, that if my child needed something, I do feel like they're all very open-door policy.

And at least that's how they talk. That's the lip service they provide" (Group F). Another parent expressed the same caution: "I mean you do have to have confidence that they're going to follow through […]. I don't trust that all the time […] that they're going to follow through" (Group F).

Building and maintaining relationships. If school adults and students find each other trustworthy, they are mostly willing to build relationships with each other. Relationships were identified as a core component of preventative or Tier 1 discipline practices, and equally or even more important than academic instruction. One school staff person engaged in RP implementation said: "[….] curriculum and standards aren't necessarily the most important things all the time, but we have to be able to cast them aside every now and then and worry about our children and how to build these relationships" (Group A). One teacher from a school implementing SWPBIS remarked: "For me, my discipline is that one-on-one relationship I have with that student. And I don't give a lot of referrals – I hardly give any referrals at all, maybe once a year" (Group B). When another staff member questioned whether it might be easier to build relationships with students with fewer support needs, their colleague stated: "So I don't think it's whether they want to be here or not, I definitely think that relationships make a huge difference in the classrooms" (Group B).

Students felt that good relationships with teachers meant teachers were willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. One student stated: "If you have a good relationship with the teacher and the teacher knows you're not constantly doing that kind of stuff, then they'll cut you a little slack when you do it that one time" (Group D). Some emphasized that they build relationships only with a few adults in their school. For example, one student said: "And there are only like two teachers that I built a relationship with throughout the three years that I've been here that I don't think I can ever build with any administrators" (Group E). Some students

seemed selective about initiating relationships with school adults. For example, a student stated: "I don't seek to get [a] relationship with everyone […] the security guard, like he and me are really close, but I don't seek to have a relationship with any of my teachers or anything" (Group E). Others, however, took the initiative to proactively build relationships with their teachers, like a student who said: "So, most of the teachers on the first day of school, I go in and I'm automatically talking to them to start building a relationship" (Group D).

Parents acknowledged teachers' efforts to build relationships with students. One parent said: "My perception is that they value building relationships with students. At least my observation is they have good relationships with my children" (Group F). At the same time, they realized the challenge teachers face in building relationships with each student: "I think that they probably deal with a lot more issues than just my child. I think that they probably don't have a personal relationship with all the kids that are on their docket" (Group G). Overall, parents felt that teachers made a genuine effort to establish and maintain positive relationships with their students, given their workload and the limited time they have with individual students.

Negotiating constraints to trust and relationship building. While all of our stakeholders valued trust and relationship building, they also spoke about the constraints under which these key discipline practices occur. For example, one school staff from a school implementing RP talked about the safeguards that need to be put in place to ensure students and parents who are undocumented immigrants feel comfortable participating in restorative interactions: "And once we say that we're a safe place to them also and we're not going to provide your information to ICE or anything like that, then they start to open up" (Group A).

Similarly, students were keenly aware of the risks of sharing information with school adults who are mandatory reporters. As one student said:

I think it just mostly depends on what you shared with that person. You could get in trouble with your parents for sharing just a little bit too much because then they could go ahead and call DHS [Department of Human Services] and then it's hard to talk to that person and look at that person. (Group D)

Another student shared this concern:

I've talked to my counselor about a few things and then she would write to DHS, and it's like it sucks, because I don't have anybody to talk to therefore I go to my counselor and then they call my mom, they call DHS, they call…like they do all that stuff. And I'm like I'm just trying to talk. I'm not… it's hard. (Group E)

Students also talked about restorative processes that seemingly rewarded inauthenticity as a threat to meaningful relationships. For example, one school had a peer court program to allow students to avoid contact with the juvenile justice system following offenses. One student described his experience with peer court and the responses of other students when asked whether they would ever use drugs in the future: "They say […] I'm not going to do that, and I'm not that type of person, but it's just annoying to watch because I know that none of that was true" (Group E). Adults' and students' reinforcement of a system that rewards dishonesty and punishes authenticity by simply saying what is expected of them undermines meaningful relationships.

Parents spoke to institutional barriers to relationship building, such as scheduling. One parent said: "Those teachers do not see those kids every day… I don't know if I can build a relationship with somebody I've seen every other day for a semester" (Group F). Other parents echoed that teachers' workloads often negatively impact trust and relationship building.

Promoting equity. All stakeholders were aware of racial and gender disparities in disciplinary practices. School personnel primarily acknowledged that these disparities existed.

One school staff from a school implementing RP offered his thoughts on equity and power imbalances: "I was thinking about how the restorative practices add [a] more level playing field between students and staff, so it is not as top-down… the process allows a little bit more of equality in the process" (Group A).

Students spoke about unequal treatment they noticed based on gender and body type. For example, one student spoke about unequal discipline for dress code violations:

> Because […] like I have a bigger chest than a lot of girls and [the school says] I can't wear a tank top, but they [more slender girls] can, and I can't wear short shorts, but they can. I was just like, "we're just people, like I'm a girl, you're a girl." (Group E)

The same student pointed to the potential role of class differences in influencing disciplinary decisions; "If there is a girl and they dress nicer and then there is another girl that looks like she may be homeless, there [are] going to be a lot of differences [in discipline]" (Group E). This student summed up her belief that administrators' discipline may work against students perceived to be in socially stigmatized groups, such as girls perceived to be more physically developed or larger, or students who appear to be unhoused saying, "If I look different, then the rules are different for me" (Group E).

Other students talked about inequities due to not having the chance to share their views of what happened. Following a social media posting that was forwarded without permission, one student recalled:

> And then when that was proven that I was telling the truth, I got in trouble but the people that started it, […] didn't get in any trouble at all […]. But I thought that was really unfair and I didn't have a single say in that at all because I got a referral and I got […] after school detention. (Group D)

Another student recalled a discipline incident involving a peer: "So I mean it's pretty unfair. This is how administration how they treat others probably because of his skin tone or race" (Group E).

Parents also recounted experiences with inequitable discipline. One parent said about her child's friend:

...and he felt like he couldn't relate to anybody teacher-wise and he was having a lot of discipline issues. He also comes from a Hispanic background and he would talk to my daughter about how he felt like he [couldn't] identify with anybody, and he felt like he didn't belong. (Group F)

Parents also raised the issue of unequal expectations based on student behavior. As one parent said: "But I also think there is almost a double standard and I won't say preferential treatment, but kids who are normally disrespectful get away with more than a child who is normally not disrespectful" (Group G).

Promoting accountability. Stakeholders agreed on the importance of holding each other accountable for the impact of their behavior. One school personnel stated: "… my approach with students is accountability and making sure they're accountable for themselves" (Group C). They also acknowledged how difficult it can be to expressly promote behavioral accountability.

Students spoke about the challenges of being accountable for their behavior. One student explained: "I probably hurt his feelings and I was very disrespectful and I shouldn't have treated him like that" (Group E). Students also talked about their teachers' difficulties in understanding how hard it can be for students at times to show accountability. As one student said of his administrator whom he perceived knew of the difficult circumstances in students' lives but did not take these into account when relating with them: "He sees what's going on and he is like, 'I don't care if your grandma died today or not,' I'm going to talk to you like if you're a regular

kid" (Group E). Across both student focus groups, participants observed that they lost respect for teachers and administrators who acted in ways to "save face" rather than "owning" that they had made poor choices (Groups D and E).

Parents felt that accountability should apply to teachers as well as students. Wondering why less skilled teachers seem to be retained by the school, one parent stated: "...from a discipline perspective, it's hard, you know, [if] kids know teachers aren't going to be held to a level, it's hard to hold kids to a level of behavior" (Group F).

Engaging in school-parent communication. Parent participants identified specific challenges as follows. One parent felt that the burden to make connections seems to fall to parents:

I don't get a sense that there's a high priority on building relationships with parents. I have to […] reach out and engage the teacher if I want to be more involved in the class and even then, it's a little bit of pulling teeth with some teachers. (Group F)

Other parents felt more positive about their school's effort to engage parents: "I've had really positive experiences with staff. Relationship building even with me and with my kids, I've had really good experiences at parent-teacher conferences" (Group G).

When school personnel and parents do not communicate, students are often left with conflicting advice. One student explained:

But my parents said if I ever got suspended or in trouble for that [fighting back when someone hurts you], we go get dinner or something. […] you're getting told by your school completely different than what your parents are telling [you]. (Group D)

School personnel from schools implementing RP described their efforts to inform parents about RP:

I know when we talk to parents regarding discipline issues, they're always on board when

we explain restorative process versus, "Hey, we're sending your kid home for two days"

or "They're in school for three days." I really would like to be able to educate our parents

more on this, but am not sure how…. Definitely, we never had any parents argue when

we were trying to restoratively repair the damage that has been done by the students.

(Group A)

Other school personnel spoke about the balance between engaged parenting and promoting

adolescent autonomy: "…for some parents of high school students, I imagine there's that balance

between letting them become an adult in their education, taking ownership of it versus at what

point did they intervene" (Group B).

Delivering RP in the Context of Existing Discipline Practices

In response to research question 2 (What might facilitate sustainable implementation of

RP given your current discipline practices?), participants identified the following key

considerations: (a) when to roll out RP, (b) who should be involved in RP implementation, (c)

how to initiate RP implementation, and (d) how to measure success.

When to roll out RP. Overall, there seemed to be consensus among school personnel

and parents that RP needed to be rolled out in the early grades. For example, one parent

explained:

I think it's something that needs to start […] in kindergarten […]. Once you get to high

school to implement something like this, I think it's kind of difficult to have somebody sit

down with perhaps the person who's there bullying them; that is a really hard thing.

(Group F)

High school personnel were sensitive to the timing of engaging entire school staffs with RP and emphasized the need to gradually build staff buy-in before attempting school-wide or even district-wide roll-out: "I would ask the question […] are there enough teachers on board and admin that feel as though this is the direction we want to go" (Group B)?

Who should be involved in RP implementation. Administrators defined the roles of individual stakeholder groups in promoting buy-in across a school community. As one district-level administrator explained:

[In] terms of shifting a high school of 1500, 2000 students, it is just a huge task, right? There are layers to this […]. And yes, there are some teachers who don't fully buy-in, and yet I don't think that's stopping the ship, right? But there are things like what [is] the amount of time you actually get with staff to do PD, and the mandates that are required are significant, right? So, it becomes a little bit more tangled and complicated than how committed are you, right? (Group H)

To change a school's discipline practices to be restorative rather than punitive, individual teacher buy-in is insufficient. District level vision and local leadership comprising staff, students, and parents are critical to promote systemic adoption of RP. School personnel indicated that blending RP into existing SWPBIS practices seemed to facilitate implementation. As one staff member explained: "[It] fit really well with PBIS and what we're already doing in a self -explanatory way, it just made sense." (Group A).

Leadership teams. An administrator of a school engaged in RP adoption described the need to involve staff as well as students in the implementation process: "[If] I had to really boil it down, what would I do to strengthen implementation, more student involvement, more staff

training" (Group A). Administrators were also sensitive to staff turn-over and the constant need to train new staff to make sure that there is school-wide consistency in discipline practices.

Early adopters vs. whole school approach. Consistent with the literature on innovation adoption (Rogers, 2010), levels of buy-in differ across school staff from early adopters to active resisters. While the ultimate goal is to implement RP school-wide and consistently across all classrooms, our participants emphasized the value of having early adopters become local leaders and champions, but also spoke to challenges associated with this implementation model. For example, one administrator said: "…a challenge was the all group together time…there's not very much time on the schedule to bring everyone together" (Group H). Another administrator mentioned: "How do we maintain the interest and the commitment of our people that were the early adopters when we still have some that are laggards […]" (Group H)?

How to initiate sustained RP implementation. There was general agreement that, to achieve sustained implementation, initial implementation needs to occur incrementally and slowly. One administrator whose district was engaged in RP implementation described the initial process:

> In the first year […] it was just […] [restorative] dialogue facilitation. This year we have incorporated the language more into the referrals and so you're slowly building it more into the system […] When we come in and try to do the all-things-all-at-once, the resistance was a lot stronger. So we've tried a lot of things in this high school because it was our first school and what we found is, ultimately, by that third to fourth year, you weren't really systematic but you're incrementally adding that from the first to second to third year" (Group A).

In addition, members of the district administrator focus group (Group H) emphasized the need for rolling out RP in a way that reinforces growth mindset or, as Carol Dweck (2006; 2016) describes, an approach in which individuals believe their talents can be developed through hard work, good strategies, and input from others. In keeping with a growth mindset, administrators experienced in RP advised against a "one and you're done" approach to training but encouraged a program of sustained coaching in which early adopters can learn through an iterative process consisting of (a) trying an RP activity; (b) reflecting on impact, often with a more experienced individual or as part of a professional learning community; (c) receiving feedback, guidance, and support as needed; (d) planning for the next RP activity; and (e) implementing. As one administrator noted:

> You have to have a team that meets regularly to talk about these things. And so I would piggyback it with the PBIS team in the school. So, you need a school that has actually a living, functioning, breathing PBIS team that meets, in my opinion, at least every two weeks, maybe less than that, especially in high school. […] A teacher will get desperate, want to know how do I fix this problem, but they haven't done all the foundational work in their classrooms. So, I think if I were queen, what I would do is have the coach be part of the PBIS team and allocate some time for this in each and every meeting. How are we doing with the implementation of restorative discipline? What are the next steps? Who's going to do what? And just like regular PBIS, you would want to start with the basics and not let them jump ahead to module five because that's what they're going to want to do (Group H).

As staff gradually adopt a restorative lens to discipline, students also become more and more familiar with RP. When the implementation effort is district-wide, high schools benefit from the

efforts of elementary and middle schools. As one administrator explained: "[R]ight now we're getting more and more buy-in just because we're getting more students up there in the high school that are seeing this process in the middle school. So, they know the process. They're familiar with it." (Group A). Long-term planning with built-in flexibility was the recommendation put forth by administrators involved in RP implementation: "[H]ave a three-year plan, have a three-year implementation plan that has the ability to be fluid" (Group A).

How to measure the success of RP. Many of our participants found that there is a disconnect between routinely collected student outcome data and RP's emphasis on trust, relationship building, and behavioral accountability. Some of our participants talked about the difficulty of associating changes in discipline referral data with RP implementation. One administrator said: "I'm like, 'Oh, did this happen because the teachers feel like we're not doing anything so they are just not writing a referral or did this happen because we're doing that good of a job'" (Group A). While school personnel shared with us that they are still focused on discipline referral data reflecting behavioral violations, they also emphasized the importance of actively using student-completed school climate surveys to assess students' perceptions of discipline practices.

Overall, there was consensus that measurement needs to catch up with RP implementation. Some school personnel were exploring new ways to measure RP outcomes. One staff member involved in RP implementation said: "

[…] we talked about how do we track the data, we went into the circles and tracking how it's impacting the student behavior and just more ideas on data collection and data analysis too. We need to come up with a way for tracking that reviews the circles […], reviews their behaviors […]. We need to work on that part of the program. (Group A).

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to gather information from our key stakeholders in preparation for designing professional development materials to facilitate effective, efficient, and sustainable RP integration with existing discipline practices. Results from our study provided important guidance about key components of existing discipline practices, the benefits and challenges of RP to address shortcoming of those existing practices, and strategies to implement RP in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner.

Trust among all members of a school community emerged as a fundamental ingredient of preventative discipline. Participants from schools implementing SWPBIS and schools implementing RP acknowledged that without trust interactions between members of the school community would likely be antagonistic and unproductive. While there is often a presumption of trust (Seldon, 2011), most of our participants made it clear that trust needs to be earned. Both school staff and students need to prove themselves trustworthy. Violations of previously earned trust can be far-reaching, especially for students. Students seemed quick to extrapolate one breach of trust to an entire category of adults (e.g., "I don't trust counselors.")

It was interesting to see that parents linked trust in school staff to the staff's willingness to adhere to school policies without exception, while students linked trust to staff's willingness to make exceptions to school policies, to give them the benefit of the doubt. This suggests that parents might understand trust as trust in the school as an institution, while students might understand trust as trust in individuals. Parents wanted to be able to trust school staff as institutional representatives; students wanted to be able to trust staff and peers as individuals.

Relationship building was acknowledged as central by personnel in the schools implementing RP, indeed as more important than meeting academic standards. Personnel in

schools implementing RP spoke about "our children" when they talked about relationship-building, suggesting that they took responsibility for connecting with students on a personal level. Personnel in the school implementing SWPBIS similarly recognized the importance of relationship building, but primarily in the context of managing student behavior in the classroom. Relationship building was deemed successful if there was no need to write referrals. This suggests that RP might require school staff to re-think their institutional role as teacher or classroom manager and consider themselves as partners in guiding children towards successful adulthood. Further, rather than school personnel engaging a "one size fits all" approach to positive behavior, restorative practices seem to compel school staff to engage in reflexive practices as part of an ongoing process of learning how best to relate with unique students often confronting unique circumstances.

Some of our student focus group participants seemed selective in whom they wanted to have relationships with and perhaps reluctant to initiate the process of building a relationship. Other students seemed more extroverted and took initiative to establish positive relationships with teachers and peers. While these differences are to be expected based on personality characteristics, it might also be related to students' history with adults violating their trust.

Parents appeared pragmatic about relationship-building. While they acknowledged the value of positive teacher-student relationships, they focused on the challenges teachers face in establishing relationships with a large number of students they come in contact with, especially given a high school class schedule that allows them to see some students perhaps only twice a week. This is an important consideration. High schools' institutional characteristics (e.g., teacher-student ratio, class schedules) might make it difficult to enter into and maintain

interpersonal relationships that go beyond meeting behavioral expectations and become learning and growth opportunities.

Participants voiced important constraints to establishing trust and building relationships when school staff talked about the reluctance of undocumented immigrants to participate in restorative conversations at school, or when students talked about their fears of school personnel, who are mandatory reporters, transmitting information shared in trust to parents or state authorities. These constraints might also include hate speech, harassment, bullying, and violence directed against students of non-White backgrounds and their families (Pollock, 2017). Students and families subjected to these threats are less likely to trust school personnel representing an institution that is part of the body politic discriminating against them. Within this context, reaching out to students and families on a personal level and acknowledging their experiences seem to be increasingly important.

The fact that none of our parent participants mentioned these constraints suggests that they were perhaps not personally affected by them. This seems to underscore the point that parents and families affected by discrimination might feel vulnerable sharing their experiences despite existing safeguards to protect their confidentiality. Similarly, individuals who have experienced institutional betrayal—who perceive institutional mechanisms, such as peer courts, as more interested in preserving their authority than in fostering authentic and consultative processes of dispute resolution—may resist efforts to build trust until they are convinced they are more than "token" gestures designed to benefit the institution over the individual. Students appear sensitized to adults mechanically repeating the rules, and students mechanically complying. These types of interactions can become farcical and undermine students' connection

to school rather than building it. Gaining the trust of students or adults who have experienced inauthentic dialogue might be challenging.

Students and parents were aware of inequities existing in their school's rules and discipline practices. Students talked about differential treatment based on body type as well as on race, skin tone, and class. While these experiences with discrimination were very real to students, they are unlikely to be reflected in data school personnel routinely review, such as discipline referral data. While disparities in discipline referrals are widely studied by practitioners and researchers (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; McIntosh, Ellwood, McCall, & Girvan, 2018), efforts are underway to better contextualize these data analyses in students' lived experiences through the use of RP (Gonzales, 2014; Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014).

Parents commented on what could be an iatrogenic effect of gathering discipline data. They mentioned that staff expectations for behavioral success depended on students' prior behavioral performance. The behavior of students routinely engaging in inappropriate behavior was more likely to be occasionally overlooked by teachers than the behavior of students who rarely engaged in inappropriate behavior. While giving struggling students an occasional break might be a strategic way to build incremental improvement, it can still be perceived as differential treatment.

Participants' discussion of their experiences with inequity or perceived discrimination needs to be further contextualized in the demographics of our participants. As Table 2 indicates, most of our participating school personnel were female and White, while most of our participating students were male and Latino. Demographic disparity between school personnel and the students entrusted to them has been linked to differential teacher expectations (Gershenson, Holt & Papageorge, 2016), and therefore remains a concern as our student

population becomes more racially diverse (Boser, 2011). Initial findings that RP can reduce racial disparities in discipline (Augustine et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2016) support further exploration of the effect of RP on disparities in students' experiences.

Some students seemed to be aware of how their behavior impacts others and indicated that they felt accountable for those impacts. Parents observed that accountability should apply to everyone in the school community. When students notice that teachers are not held to professional standards, they are unlikely to feel accountable for their own behavior. Consistent expectations across staff and students are an important consideration. Despite their desire to distance themselves from adults and make autonomous decisions (Hafen et al., 2012), adolescent students are keenly aware of how adults act and carefully choose whom to trust.

Participants provided useful guidance on how to integrate RP into existing discipline systems. Several participants advocated for introducing RP in the elementary grades, especially if entire districts are committed to RP implementation. For example, one staff member emphasized that their RP implementation at the high school level benefited from students coming from feeder schools that exposed them to RP. Given that student participation and buy-in is an important part of successful RP implementation, as a staff member explained, exposing students to RP at a young age seems advantageous. RP might be especially responsive to the needs of adolescent students as they seek greater autonomy from adults and voicing their own opinions (Ortega et al., 2006).

Participants' recommendation to simultaneously promote bottom-up buy-in through focusing on early adopters of RP and top-down buy-in through developing district-level leadership and broad implementation plans is consistent with the current recommendation for introducing RP into school systems (Gregory & Evans, 2020). District level commitment can

translate into making scarce professional development time available to RP trainings, or promoting the use of professional learning communities focused on RP. Sustainable RP implementation requires long-term planning for scaling up and continuous data collection to build evidence for clearly defined benefits. The core message from our participants was that RP implementation needs to occur gradually and incrementally, in order to change discipline systems from a focus on behavioral compliance to a focus on understanding the impact of behavior on self and others.

The need to collect data that reflect students' school experiences as a measure of the extent to which discipline practices are successful became clear. Office discipline referral data appear a very limited measure of students' behavioral success, and might be reflective of teacher perceptions and potential biases. Finding valid and reliable tools to quickly and frequently assess student perceptions of their school's discipline practices might be a critical step in promoting RP implementation in schools.

Limitations

The outcomes of our study need to be interpreted within the context of the following limitations. Although we recruited participants from schools engaged in SWPBIS and/or RP implementation, we did not know the extent to which each disciplinary approach was implemented at each site. Implementation might have varied across sites, which might have impacted our participants' familiarity with or exposure to each disciplinary approach. Our goal was to design professional development materials to guide teachers in effectively, efficiently and sustainably integrating RP with existing multi-tiered support systems (MTSS). Because this integration might occur at various stages of implementing RP or SWPBIS, we were interested in perspectives from novice as well as experienced implementers of RP and/or SWPBIS in order to

design training materials useful to schools interested in blending the two approaches regardless of their current implementation status of one or the other.

Individual participants' understanding of SWPBIS and RP might also have varied. To make sure that all participants responded within the same conceptual framework, the facilitator provided broad definitions of those concepts during the focus group discussions. We deliberately kept definitions broad in order to allow participants to freely engage with these concepts and express their various lived experiences with them.

Second, although the facilitator of each focus group made every effort to follow the focus group questions and allocate similar amounts of time to each question, the dynamics of each group differed with some participants sharing more than others. As a result, unequal amounts of time were allocated to questions across focus groups. Focus groups also differed in size, which further may have impacted the dynamics of a group. Our smallest group consisted of three participants and our largest group consisted of seven participants. Finally, although we had a total of 40 participants, our findings are not necessarily representative of high school personnel, students, and parents in general.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The findings from our study identified key themes of successful and challenging discipline practices. These key themes will need to be considered when conceptualizing professional development intended to aid teachers in integrating RP into existing MTSS. Building training materials around these themes will make it more likely that the training will be perceived as relevant and authentic to high school teachers (Hunzicker, 2011). Based on the lessons learned from our stakeholders, training materials might need to be built around trust-building strategies, student and parent engagement with restorative practices, and an emphasis on

establishing positive relationships and trust in each other as a primary or preventative discipline approach. Only when trusting relationships exist can they be restored when harm has occurred to individual members of the school community, or the community as a whole.

To promote sustainable implementation of a blended approach to discipline, training delivery might need to balance top-down as well as bottom-up buy-in by involving an entire school staff in broad conceptual overviews to build top-down awareness, while providing specific skill-building to early adopters only to build bottom-up buy-in and incremental adoption Early adopters might benefit from practicing specific restorative skills (e.g., the use of affective language, leading a proactive circle, or engaging a student in a restorative chat) to develop their capacity with building and re-building trusting relationships. Blending RP with MTSS clearly requires conceptualizing RP along a multi-tiered continuum and providing opportunities to practice proactive as well as responsive RP strategies. It might be important to train teachers to reach out to and include parents in their RP implementation efforts to promote school-home partnerships necessary to support students. Finally, to promote sustainable implementation, it might be useful to add coaching to the training curriculum. Training local personnel to become local resources to support teachers in their implementation efforts might further help to build internal capacity and advocacy for RP. Professional development that is sensitive to these needs has the potential to facilitate integrating RP into high school's existing discipline systems in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner.

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Table 1

Participating school demographics

	School A[2]	School B	School C	School D
Overall enrollment	67	677	1267	1497
Minority enrollment	16%	56%	25%	36%
Free or reduced-priced lunch eligible	70%	56%	39%	47%

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[2] School A was an alternative private school serving students aged 14 to 21 with an emphasis on vocational training.

Table 2
Overview of Focus Group Participants. Participants could choose more than one Race/Ethnicity,

Stakeholder Group	Group[3] (discipline approach	N	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Grade
School Personnel	Group A (SWPBIS & RP)	6	Male 1: Female: 5	Latinx: 1 White: 6	NA	NA
	Group B (SWPBIS)	5	Male: 1 Female: 4	Latinx: 1 White: 5		
	Group C (SWPBIS, beginning RP)	3	Male: 1 Female: 2	Latinx: 0 White: 2 African-American: 1		
Subtotal School Personnel		**14**	**Male: 3 Female: 11**	**Latinx: 2 White: 13 African-American: 1**		
Students	Group D (SWPBIS)	7	Male: 4 Female: 3	Latinx: 4 Asian: 1 White: 3 Multiracial: 3	Straight: 5 Lesbian: 1 Bisexual: 1	9th: 4 11th: 3
	Group E (SWPBIS, beginning RP)	4	Male: 3 Female: 1	Latinx: 3 White: 1 Multiracial: 1	Straight: 4	10th: 3 11th: 1
Subtotal Students		**11**	**Male: 7 Female: 4**	**Latinx: 7 White: 4 Multiracial: 4**	**Straight: 9 Lesbian: 1 Bisexual: 1**	**9th: 4 10th: 3 11th: 4**
Parents	Group F (SWPBIS)	5	Male: 1 Female: 4	Latinx: 0 White: 4 Multiracial: 1	N/A	9th: 1 10th: 2 11th: 2
	Group G (SWPBIS, beginning RP)	6	Male: 0 Female: 6	Latinx: 0 White 6		9th: 3 11th: 3 12th: 2
Subtotal Parents		**11**	**Male: 1 Female: 10**	**Latinx: 0 White: 10 Multiracial: 1**		**9th: 4[4] 10th: 2 11th: 5 12th: 2**
Administrators	Group H (SWPBIS Districts)	4	Male: 1[5] Female: 1 Transgender: 1	Latinx: 1 American Indian/Alaska Native: 1 White: 1	N/A	N/A
Total		**40**				

[3] Group A = School A and B, Group B, D, and F = School C, Group C, E, and G = School D.
[4] Some Parents had multiple children at various grade levels.
[5] One participant chose not to complete the demographic questionnaire

Table 3
Focus Group Questions Overview

School Personnel/ Administrators	How does your school define RP/SWPBIS? (facilitator provides definitions as necessary)
	Why and how did your school choose to implement RP/SWPBIS?
	Was RP added to existing initiatives or systemic practices? If so, what were they?
	Does your school assess fidelity of implementation of RP/SWPBIS? If so, how?
	What are some of the greatest benefits of RP/SWPBIS in your school?
	To what extent are students and parents included in RP/SWPBIS implementation?
	Were there any unintended negative effects of RP/SWPBIS in your school?
	Are you measuring changes in discipline outcomes and discipline disparities since you started RP/SWPBIS?
	Do you feel that SWPBIS can be aligned with RP? What would be the challenges and benefits of this alignment?
	What training(s) in RP did your school's staff receive? Did you participate in the trainings?
	What were some of the greatest barriers to adopting RP in your school?
	Are staff and students supportive of RP? If so, how did you get staff and student buy-in?
	What would you do to strengthen your school's RP implementation?
	What advice would you give to a school that is going to implement RP?
Students	What are your school's behavioral expectations?
	What happens if a student violates those expectations?
	Do you think the consequences for behavioral violations at your school are fair?
	Do you have a say in what happens after a discipline incident?
	Are you familiar with RP? (facilitator provides definition)
	Have you participated in circles, restorative conferences, peer court, or relationship building activities?
	Do you think students in your school would benefit from these practices?
	What would be the greatest barriers of these practices in your school?
	Could there be unintended negative consequences of these practices in your school?
	Do you think these practices could encourage students in your school to take greater responsibility for their behavior?
Parents	Are you familiar with SWPBIS? (facilitator provides definition)
	How do you feel about the discipline practices in your child's school?
	Are you informed about behavioral violations?
	If there is conflict, do staff at your child's school make an effort to learn about the circumstances that led to the conflict?
	What would be the greatest barriers to using RP in your child's school? (facilitator provides definition of RP)
	Do you see parents having a role in RP if it were used at your child's school?
	Could there be unintended negative consequences of RP in your child's school?
	Do you think RP could encourage students at your child's school to take greater responsibility for their behavior?