

Sustainability of Whole School Change Through Restorative Practices:

An Independent Action-Research Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research study was to conduct an investigation into the probability for sustainability of IIRP's whole school change program through Restorative Practices, at Freedom High School in Bethlehem, PA. This in depth mixed-method study closely examined the restorative practices of 5 teachers and 1 administrator to determine level of implementation fidelity and to gain insight into perceived outcomes resulting from practice, and the perceived factors supporting and impeding implementation. Based in a model of sustainability proposed in current literature, a juxtaposition of these findings with those revealed across studies on SWPBS revealed probability for sustainability was low due the existence of significant barriers. Moderate-to-low fidelity, lack of professional development, and lack of parent involvement were found to be the most significant barriers to sustainability. Significant factors supporting implementation were administrative support, collaboration and support from other team leaders and strong restorative "role-models". It was suggested that these "assets" might "*collectively*" be able to overcome the barriers if invested purposefully. In light of significant imitations inherent in the small study sample there was implication for further investigation on a school-wide scale in order increase validity of findings. Recommendations for future action planning were also proposed.

Background and Rationale

Over the last decade, thousands of schools across the United States and Canada have adopted School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support (SWPBS), in place of traditional punitive measures, to encourage adherence to behavioral norms, change patterns of problem behaviors exhibited by students, and maintain an overall positive school climate. Much to their dismay, but not surprising, so many of these schools fail to sustain these practices (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009; McIntosh, MacKay, Hume, Doolittle, Vincent, Horner, & Ervin, 2011; McIntosh, Predy, Upreti, Hume, Turri, & Mathews, 2014). Because “school context is dynamic, changing significantly and unpredictably across and within school years” (McIntosh, Mercer, Hume, Frank, Turri, & Mathews, 2013), implementing systems-level school-based practices with fidelity is a daunting task that requires varying levels of ongoing resources. Programs can only reach a level of sustainability when fidelity of practice can be maintained throughout, or in spite of inevitable changes, and positive outcomes are actualized in the long term (McIntosh, et al. 2013).

The International Institute of Restorative Practices’ SaferSanerSchools™ Whole-School Change Program, while not a formalized SWPBS program, reports that it has “helped even the most challenging schools improve their teaching and learning environments through ‘restorative practices’, a proactive approach to whole-school climate change based on communication and responsibility” (International Institute of Restorative Practices, 2011). This comprehensive two-year implementation program trains teachers in practices designed to “build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making” (Wachtel, 2012). In 2011, Bethlehem Area School District adopted this program and piloted it at the two high schools in response to analysis of their School Improvement Survey data that revealed a need to

improve overall school climate, and address the increasing trends in disciplinary infractions and punitive sanctions. Currently the district's current "Roadmap To Educational Excellence 2.0" (Bethlehem Area School District, 2013) identifies "Restorative Practices" (RP) as one of ten interconnecting frameworks that support all educational and professional processes expected to advance the district's charge to assure high-quality education and improved achievement for all students. In light of this, sustainability is paramount, so this research project investigated the probability for sustainability of whole school change program at one of the two pilot high schools, namely Freedom High.

As a committed restorative practitioner in BASD's Freedom High School, this author has experienced first-hand the power of Restorative Practices to promote positive classroom climate and affect positive behavioral change in some of the most difficult students. Furthermore, since the onset of the district's 2011 pilot implementation of IIRP's SaferSanerSchools™ Whole-School Change Program, examination of Freedom's longitudinal data of discipline referrals over the initial three years of implementation clearly indicates a notable decline in total number of Level 1, 2, and 3 infractions and disciplinary sanctions. Although, an overall decrease in referrals across all ethnicities was evident, Latinos and African Americans were still disproportionately overrepresented in school discipline. However, a recent study led by Ann Gregory of Rutgers University resulted in findings that had implications "for the potential of RP in terms of reducing the racial discipline gap" (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2015). Results in this study found "higher RP implementation was associated with lower use of disruption/defiance disciplinary referrals with Latino and African American students (Gregory, et.al., 2015) The need to give consideration, time, and attention to the issue of RP sustainability is not only validated by the racial disparity in discipline that persists, but also in Freedom's mid-year data

from Sept 2010/2011-December 2014/2015. While the total number of disciplinary referrals was still significantly lower than that of pre-RP implementation, a closer examination of the data reveals that the current school year totals have nearly doubled in 6 out of the 7 infraction categories when compared to that of 2013-2014. Any number of factors might be contributing to these trends. Waning fidelity of building-wide Restorative Practices implementation may well be one of them. Therefore, it seemed necessary to conduct an investigation designed to shed light on Freedom's level of fidelity with which RP is being implemented and the factors that either support or impede implementation. Based on this information, the probability for sustainability of Restorative Practices might also be predicted.

While a substantial body of research on factors specifically affecting RP sustainability is scarce, there is a large base of research on the factors related to sustainability of other school-based practices, most particularly SWPBS, that when closely examined provide findings that seem generalizable to RP. For instance, one proposed model for sustainability of school-based practices by McIntosh, Horner, & Sugai (2009) identified four hypothesized broad-based factors affecting sustainability: priority, effectiveness, efficiency, and continuous regeneration. Inherent in the broad-based factors are a myriad of interrelated variable factors that have an impact on fidelity including, but not limited to, staff commitment (buy-in); administrative support; teaming (collaboration of all stakeholders); collection and use of data; and capacity building (professional development). The interdependent nature of these factors, and the likelihood one or more of them would be negatively affected when a "deficiency exists in any one of the other factors" (McIntosh, et al. 2009) is corroborated across several other studies on sustainability of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support, Individual Positive Behavior Support, and Fourth R programs, so the idea that this research is generalizability to RP is tenable (Bambara, et al. 2009;

Crooks, C., Chiodo, D., Zwarych, S., Hughes, R., & Wolfe, D. 2013; McIntosh, et al., 2011; McIntosh, Mercer, Hume, Frank, Turri, & Mathews, 2013; McIntosh, Predy, Upreti, Hume, Turri, & Mathews, 2014).

Across these studies, fidelity of implementation is found to be *the* critical component of sustainability. Interrelated factors that consistently emerge as important at varying level of statistical significance include administrative support on the district and building level; effective teaming; use of data-based decision making; the extent to which SWPBS is understood and accepted as typical practice and integrated into other school initiatives; ongoing professional development; and stakeholder involvement (Bambara, et al., 2009; Crooks, Chiodo, Zwarych, Hughes, & Wolfe, 2013; McIntosh, Mackay, et al. 2011; McIntosh, Mercer, et al., 2013; McIntosh, et al., 2014). An initial, informal comparative examination of these findings with Freedom's longitudinal data, and this author's first-hand historical and current experience with RP implementation at Freedom High School, gave some credence to the possibility that sustainability of its whole-school change initiative might be threatened. Decreased fidelity, and lack of administrative support inherent in a discrepancy between the practices they modeled and what they expected of others were some of the impeding factors *initially* perceived by this investigator. Additionally, McIntosh, Mercer, et al. (2013) propose that sustainability is achieved "when a principal can empower teams to meet regularly, improve skills, and use data for decision making." In line with this thinking, during the first three years of RP implementation, attempts were made by Freedom's administration to incorporate the practice of Professional Learning Groups (PLGs). These meetings were designed for small teams of teachers to engage in a reiterative process whereby they would present their struggles with RP implementation, get supportive and solutions-based feedback from peers, and then be held

accountable to report back at the next meeting as to how the change in practice served to improve outcomes. Due to a plethora of other systemic and programmatic issues simultaneously discouraging teachers and competing against their attention, attempts at instituting PLGs as a consistent, standard practice failed. Scheduled time for building leadership, department, and committee meetings transformed into meetings dedicated more to addressing competing concerns, and less to fidelity of RP implementation. Crooks, et al. (2013), note that there needs to be a shift from thinking “implementation fidelity, (the strongest predictor for sustainability), as an event...to an ongoing process.” This speaks to the need for ongoing professional development opportunities relative to RP and initial training for new teachers. Both of these have been almost non-existent over the past two years, in spite of the fact that the district has attempted to address this issue by investing in training of a small number of administrators and teachers to be RP trainers. To-date there has been no indication that time or attention has been given to effectively employing members of this training team to serve in their intended capacity. However, in consideration of the limitations inherent in the small scope of the initial comparative examination done from the singular perspective of this author, the need to delve further into this topic was clearly validated.

This action research study, therefore, addressed the need for further investigation through a broader and deeper examination into Restorative Practices implementation of five teachers and one administrator to answer the following questions:

- Is Restorative Practices implementation evident at Freedom High School, and to what degree of fidelity?
- What are the perceived outcomes resulting from Freedom’s RP implementation?
- What are the perceived factors supporting RP Implementation?

- What are the perceived factors impeding RP Implementation?
- Based on Freedom's current implementation practices, what is the relative probability for long-term sustainability?

METHOD

Participants

The target population of this action research study was faculty and staff at Freedom High School. Since fidelity of implementation and sustainability of restorative practices were the specific topics to be explored, the research sample was logically streamlined to include only those faculty members who had, at least, received the Basic Restorative Practices training four years ago when building-wide implementation was initiated, or anytime thereafter. The number of participants, and the means by which data would be collected from the sample, needed to be manageable based upon time and systemic restraints existent in the high school setting. From that perspective, a convenience selection was utilized to obtain a sample. Initially, it was determined the sample would consist of at least 6, but no more than 10 participants, and was limited to instructional staff (teachers and counselors) and at least one assistant principal.

The building principal was employed to provide the names of faculty members who he knew had received at least the Basic Restorative Practices professional development training, and whom he observed to be implementing Restorative Practices with "some degree of fidelity" since initial training. He provided twelve names of instructional staff, including one administrator, out of the total of approximately 110 members. Subsequently, these ten professionals were emailed, and informed about the intent of the study, the fact they had been recommended by the principal as viable candidates for the study, and asked to respond if they

were interested in participating. Three teachers responded within two days, so a second request was sent out to the remainder of potential candidates, and this resulted in one more teacher response. A third email failed to generate any more responses, so in order to fill the last “teacher/counselor” spot, the primary investigator decided to be one of the participants. Clearly, this choice came along with increased risk of bias affecting various aspects of the study, in addition to the bias evident in the fact that she was also a colleague of each participant. Nonetheless, based upon the fact that it was an action research study, the benefits reaped by the self-reflection on the investigator’s own restorative practice via the interview process and self-assessment survey seemed to outweigh the risks aforementioned. Furthermore, the supervising professor of the study was consulted on this issue, and did not express any significant objections. Finally, after securing the five teacher participants, a commitment to participate was secured from one building administrator during an impromptu face-to-face contact with the primary investigator in the hallway. Table 1 summarizes participant demographics.

Table 1**Participant Demographics**

Particip. Code	Gen-der	Years Exp.	Job Title	Subject Area	Avg # Students per class	Description of Training in Restorative Practices
P1-re15	F	15	Teacher	English-Drama & Public Speaking	18-35	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, “classroom experience”
P2-se30	M	30	Teacher	Special Ed.-Work Training	5-10	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, Master’s of Science Degree in RP (June 2015)
P3-re9	F	9	Teacher	World Language Heritage & Spanish I & II	18-36	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, “working hands-on with kids- you see what works & what doesn’t.”
P4-ad23 (*)	M	23	Administrator	Discipline-Gd. 9-12	NA	4-day professional development event at IIRP headquarters prior to start of year 2 of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices,

						Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, & Family Engagement & Empowerment
P5-se10 (*)	F	10	Teacher	Special Ed-Emotional Support	NA	Master's of Science degree (30 graduate credits) in Restorative Practices: 2009, Leadership Training, Training of Trainers
P6-se34 (*)	F	34	Teacher Dept. Chair	Special Ed Remedial Reading	12-15	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, Graduate Student in IIRP's Master's degree program: completed 21/30 credits, Leadership Training, Training of Trainers

(*) "Targeted" Staff Members -those who are selected/trained/expected to facilitate Restorative Conferences based on training, experience, and/or leadership role they play.

Research Procedures and Measures

Two methods of data collection were employed to examine the research questions. The IIRP Staff Self-Assessment survey was used to collect quantitative data, and one-on-one interviews were utilized to collect qualitative data. The survey required each participant to reflect on their practice and evaluate the level of proficiency/fidelity with which they execute the 11 essential elements necessary for successful whole-school implementation of restorative practices. IIRP identifies the following 11 essential elements necessary for successful whole-school implementation (IIRP, 2011):

- Affective Statements
- Restorative Questions
- Small Impromptu Conferences
- Proactive Circles
- Responsive Circles
- Restorative Conferences
- Fair Process
- Reintegrative Management of Shame
- Restorative Staff Community

- Restorative Approach with Families
- Fundamental Hypothesis Understandings

On the survey, each of the 11 elements was categorized based on “who needs to understand and use each element to change the culture of the school” (IIRP, 2011). “School-wide” (**SW**) elements are those to be utilized by all staff. “Broad-based” (**BB**) elements are those to be utilized by instructional and administrative staff members. ‘Restorative Conferences’ is the one “Targeted” (**T**) element to be facilitated only by members of a multidisciplinary team selected, trained, and proficient at carrying out that specific element. All of the participants in this study fell in the school-wide and broad-based categories, and 3 out of the six met the criteria for “targeted” staff members based on training, experience, and/or the leadership role they play.

These participants are identified in Table 1 with an asterisk (*). Each element on the survey was subdivided into “characteristics” that exemplify proficiency in that respective element.

Participants were asked to mark the answer that “most describes you”, based on the degree of frequency, or level of quality, with which they implement each characteristic. The rating scale used included the following measures: “not at all” (1), “rarely” (2), “sometimes”(3), “often”(4), “always”(5).

One-on-one interviews were utilized to obtain qualitative data. The privacy of a one-on-one format was perceived by this investigator to increase participant’s feeling of anonymity, thereby increasing willingness to be open and honest in responses. This format also increased the likelihood that each session would remain focused, and be completed within the projected time limit. Interviews were held in a private office, or other classroom in the high school, where there was minimal risk for interruptions caused by background noise and/or daily traffic in order to minimize factors that might hinder the interview &/or digital voice recording process. Each of

the interviews was recorded on a digital voice recorder, and each participant file given an exclusive numerical code (see Table 1) for storing and organizing of data. Interview tapes were transcribed twice. The initial transcription was done in handwritten format. These handwritten notes were then transposed into a typed format. This second process afforded the primary investigator the opportunity to code and reorganize the raw data into a format that was easier to read and allowed for more effective examination and analysis.

In consideration of ethical research practices, a written consent form, a copy of the IIRP Self-Assessment Survey, and a list of the questions to be used during the interview, was placed in a folder and given to each of the participants prior to each interview session. The list of “Guiding Questions” used to frame each interview is provided in Appendix A. Once folders were distributed for their review, each participant received an email asking what time of day they preferred to do their interviews: during preparation period or after school. Once preferences were obtained, initial dates were secured for each interview, with the understanding that they would be rescheduled, if need be, due to unforeseen circumstances. Interviews were held and survey data was collected after written consent was obtained. The span of time required to complete the data collection plan as described was 10 weeks.

Data Analytic Plan

Participant survey ratings for each of the 11 Essential Element characteristics were organized into tables and averaged to calculate an overall performance score for each specific element. From there, the total of all participants’ element means scores were averaged to calculate a “group mean score” (GMS) for that particular element. All averages were rounded to the nearest 10th decimal. Individual characteristic ratings of 4 and 5, and participant/group

means of 4.0-5.0, were highlighted in green to indicate a high degree of “frequency or quality of performance”. Characteristic ratings of 3 and participant/group means of 3.0-3.9 were highlighted in yellow to indicate a “moderate” performance. Characteristic ratings of 2 and 1, and participant/group means of 1.0-2.9 were highlighted in grey to indicate “low” performance. It should be noted that a participant’s original response of “NA” (non-applicable) or “?” (unsure) in place of a numerical value to any Element Characteristic on the survey was changed to a “1”. It was the opinion of the investigator that a participant’s uncertainty about their level of performance, or belief that a particular item was not applicable to them, was synonymous to a rating of “not at all”, or that of “low” quality of performance. The investigator believed the change to a numerical value allowed for consistency in calculating averages, thereby increasing reliability and validity of scores. Elements 4 through 7 included an additional question that required each participant to identify the average number of times the particular element was executed in a specific span of time. Therefore, the tables for these elements were broken down into an “A” and “B” format to reflect the extra survey question placed after each of these characteristics. Appendix B provides examples of the method used to organize the survey data as described herein.

Typed transcriptions of participant responses were identified according to the code originally assigned to their digital recording file, and reorganized so that responses were grouped together under each of the six specific “Guiding Questions”. During initial review, excerpts from transcripts were first highlighted in yellow when the investigator found evidence therein to participants’ understanding of and/or practical application of the 11 Essential Elements. During several subsequent reviews, excerpts that provided evidence participants had observed occurrences of RP implementation *by other* staff members were also highlighted. Extrapolation

of data was enhanced as highlighted excerpts were then coded alphanumerically based upon the specific element for which it evidenced. When the connection between excerpt and element was not clearly evident, further clarification was given by adding additional coding and parenthetical notes that identified the specific element characteristic demonstrated in that particular excerpt. Finally, parenthetical notes were added to identify those excerpts that specifically related to research questions 3 & 4 (supporting or impeding factor to RP implementation). Appendix C provides an example of the method of analysis applied to the transcription notes.

The number of coded responses found in each participant's interview responses was totaled per element. The highest number of occurrences was 20, and the lowest was 5. The maximum number of occurrences was divided by 3 to calculate a "low", "medium", and "high" range of performance that could be compared to the group mean scores and corresponding level of performances derived using the survey data. A total number of 0-6 occurrences was interpreted a "low" fidelity, 7-13 as "moderate", and 14-20 as "high". When comparing # of coded responses to GMS, inconsistency between levels of fidelity were adjusted to derive a reasonably reliable overall level of fidelity. For example, the range for "moderate" fidelity was 7-13 coded responses. Therefore, 12 coded occurrences of "Affective Statements" indicated a *high-end moderate* score. The weight of this when balanced with a GMS score of 4.1 (high), resulted in a fidelity rating of "high" for that element. Similarly, a *low-end moderate* number of occurrences for "Fair Process" balanced with a *low-end high* GMS score, were interpreted to be "moderate" fidelity. The total number of coded responses and GMS scores was averaged to calculate an overall level of implementation fidelity for all eleven essential elements. Table 2 summarizes this combined system of qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

Table 2

11 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS	# of Coded Responses	Level of Fidelity	GMS	Level of Fidelity	Combined Fidelity
Proactive Circles	20	high	4.0	high	HIGH
Small Impromptu Conferences	16	high	4.0	high	HIGH
Restorative Questions	14	high	4.2	high	HIGH
Responsive Circles	14	high	4.2	high	HIGH
Affective Statements	12	moderate	4.1	high	HIGH
Fundamental Hypothesis Understanding	11	moderate	4.2	high	HIGH
Fair Process	7	moderate	4.1	high	MODERATE
A Restorative Approach with Families	7	moderate	3.4	moderate	MODERATE
Reintegrative Management of Shame	7	moderate	3.7	moderate	MODERATE
A Restorative Staff Community	7	moderate	2.9	low	LOW
Restorative Conferences	5	low	3.1	moderate	LOW
AVERAGE	12	Moderate	3.6	Moderate	MODERATE

RESULTS

Is Restorative Practices implementation evident at Freedom High School, and to what degree of fidelity?

The result of data analysis as summarized in Table 2 indicates RP implementation is occurring at a “moderate” degree of fidelity, but must be interpreted with caution, in light of notable discrepancies that became evident during data analysis. For example, during his interview, P4 reported having facilitated “meetings” in which he admittedly “does not use the full questioning of RP”, but works collaboratively “with students and parents to attain the goal of understanding that their actions affect others, and how they can handle these mistakes.” This describes what he considers “Small Impromptu Conferences.” Accordingly, he documented in the survey that he ran 100 of these in a 6-month period. Interesting to note, however, is that while the *quantity* of these conferences indicates a high frequency of occurrence, and therefore was interpreted to equal “high” fidelity, examination of survey ratings for specific characteristics of this element, indicated a low fidelity of performance. According to what was shared during his interview, this might be attributed to what he admitted was an under utilization of the Restorative

Questions and Affective Statements. He additionally noted, that as an assistant principal in charge of discipline, the need to deal with “lower level incidences” is infrequent (See Appendix B, Element 3 A and 3B). If this is true, that one might conclude that he utilizes Small Impromptu Conferences, rather than Restorative Conferences (Element 6) which are often more appropriate in dealing with more serious or “higher level” incidences. This might be attributed to the “lack of time” he identified as a barrier to implementing restorative practices. Restorative conferences require a good deal of preparation that taxes this valuable resource.

Restorative Conferences was one of the two elements that received an overall “low” rating. Participants 4, 5, & 6 were the only ones identified as “targeted” members. Both quantitative and qualitative data validated that only *Participant 5* had actually facilitated any formal conferences since initial RP implementation. Interesting, however, was the fact that survey responses for P1, 2, & 3 indicated *they* had facilitated conferences (see Appendix B, Element 6A & B), but there was no corroborating evidence to this in their coded responses to interview questions. The discrepancies might be attributed to confusion on the part of the participants between the meaning of “Restorative Conference” with that of “restorative/responsive circles or impromptu conferences/meetings.” The former is a process in which there is most often a “victim” and “offender” involved, and the conference must move through very specific phases guided by a specially designed script for the facilitator to follow” (IIRP, 2011). The later is a more informal process used in response to students’ academic or behavioral issues using the Restorative Questions to guide the conversation. During their interviews, P2 & P3 reported conferencing or doing circles with students using the questions to “provide a unique focus to the discussion and allow for a game plan for an achieved goal” (P1), “to get feedback” (P2), and to keep “focused on how we can make things better” (P3), but these

scenarios were not actually formal conferences. As stated previously, the only data validating actual facilitation of a formal restorative conference was found in the survey and interview responses of Participant 5. As seen in Appendix B, Element 6 A & 6B, she rated “5” for all characteristics, and a total of 1 conference ran in the last 6 months. Based on qualitative data, “all necessary contacts and pre-conference preparations took place according to protocol” (P5).

Participant satisfaction was achieved in both conferences. One family “sent an email that they felt very supported and comfortable with the Freedom Family after the conference”, and after the second conference “the administrative team and family were on its way back to a strong foundation” (P5). Moreover, while not the facilitator, P6 reported taking part in a Restorative Conference in year two of RP implantation at the high school, and found the experience to be very positive. Administrative role modeling was demonstrated as the “principal took the risk to use the conference, not as a replacement of discipline or natural legal consequences, but as a means to facilitate a process whereby the offender could begin to “repair the harm”, the healing process could begin, and the offenders “could be given an opportunity to be reintegrated back into the community” (P6). Therefore, although Restorative Conferences have been infrequent, data analysis revealed the fidelity with which they have been implemented has actually been “high”, with only one exception. P1 participated in a formal conference gone awry during year one of whole-school change through RP implementation. This experience heightened her awareness that “the danger of causing more harm than good comes when you try to do something like a restorative conference too early, without all the preparation that needs to go into it beforehand, or when it’s not what everybody wants” (P1).

A low level of fidelity for “A Restorative Staff Community” was mostly corroborated through analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, with one slight contradiction. Participants

made several references during interviews suggesting administrators do what P4 and P5 termed “walking the restorative talk”. Specifically, P5 noted her upper level administrator “uses the restorative framework to have conversations with families, kids, in IEP meetings, and with the teachers.” Furthermore, for the survey item ‘*The administration models restorative practices*’, one participant rated “always” (high), 3 out of 5 rated “sometimes” (moderate). Surprisingly, the only administrator in the sample rated this item a “1” (not at all/low). This is the same administrator who was noted earlier in the report to underutilize the basic elements of Restorative Questions and Affective Statements during Small Impromptu Conferences in response to behavioral incidents involving students. Therefore, one might assume that this would be the case in his dealings with staff. This subsequently raises the question as to whether the low rating he gave was based more on his own performance, rather than being based on a level of fidelity that included the performance of his fellow administrators. In line with the overall “low” rating for Element 9, the only other interview responses that provided evidence that Freedom was a “restorative staff community”, came from P6 who reported “holding department meetings in circles and using impromptu conferences framed with the Restorative Questions to resolve issues between staff.” The moderate to low survey ratings by the majority of participants for the remaining characteristics in this element coincided with a low number of coded responses to interview questions.

Based on the sum total of what the data revealed, Restorative Practices implementation *is* evident at Freedom High School. In light of noted discrepancies in the data, and excluding limitations in this study to be presented later, it is reasonable to conclude that, *at best*, the level of fidelity with which it is occurring is moderate.

What are the perceived outcomes resulting from Freedom’s RP implementation?

Extrapolation of qualitative data revealed three dominant themes relative to perceived outcomes: decrease in disciplinary referrals/sanctions, overall positive classroom/school climate, and increased student engagement/performance. Table 3 summarizes perceived outcomes of RP implementation in order by number of participants out of the total who identified each outcome.

Table 3

Perceived Outcomes of RP Implementation	# out of 6 Participants who Identified Outcome
Decrease in Discipline Referrals	6
Overall Positive School Climate	5
Increased Student Engagement	5
Reparation of Rift in parent-school relationships	3
Improved listening &/or general communication skills	1

Implementation of RP seems to be in direct correlation to a decrease in disciplinary referral and sanctions because “since it was started, discipline numbers are way down”(P4). This downward trend in discipline data was indirectly supported by several participant reports that restorative processes were being implemented proactively, and/or in response to incidence of negative behavior “instead of just dishing out punitive consequences for actions” (P1). It is possible that having these practices to pull out of their tool boxes, contributed to teachers “feeling more confident in, or maybe willing to, deal with kids and not just give up their power by turning to a referral or a disciplinary consequence” (P5).

The majority of participants also made reference to the perception that ‘things are going good’ at Freedom High School. “The overall climate among the faculty is positive” (P1), and “there is a very high morale” (P5). “The level of respect in the classroom has increased” (P3). Staff feel “like they are valued, they matter, and they’re being supported” (P5). Based on the

awareness that this is a dominant positive outcome, it is not unreasonable to raise question as to the basis of P4's low rating of the characteristic - "administration models restorative practices".

Student engagement has increased, as RP implementation has "created an environment that's ripe for open to discussion, honest reflection, appropriate feedback" (P1). Active participation is more common not just during circles, but during class in general. "More students are staying in program than are giving up...and students are more engaged when they come in to the class" (P2). "RP has had a significant positive impact on students' performance both behaviorally and academically" (P6). Other outcomes identified, but not frequent enough to be considered a dominant theme included; helping to repair rifts in relationships between parents and school, and helping to improve listening skills and overall communication skills.

What are the perceived factors supporting RP Implementation?

Table 4 summarizes the perceived factors that support RP implementation in order by number of participants who identified each factor.

Table 4

Perceived Factors That Support RP Implementation	# out of 6 Participants who Identified Supporting Factor
Administrative Support	6
Team Collaboration and Support	4
Access to faculty members who are strong "restorative role-models"	3
Curriculum and class size & structure compatible to RP	3
A sense that RP is a natural fit, so easily integrated into daily practice	3
Access to data to track progress	1

Administrative support in the form of role modeling, encouragement, and willingness to engage teachers in decision-making was the most frequently noted factor supporting RP

implementation. An environment created by a building administrator really sets the tone as to whether or not RP can be affective” (P1). While a “top-down mindset doesn’t always work,” it is important for district administration and building principals to give direction and encouragement by saying, “You need to do this”, and “We need to see this more of that...but what’s more important is that they work together with others and role model” (P4). “The restorative framework must happen at the administrative level, in order to have “a trickle down effect” so that all members of staff model restorative practices “in dealings with each other, and ultimately with kids” (P5).

In addition to administrative support, a majority of participants also felt that access to fellow faculty members who were strong restorative role models, in addition to a supportive team of counselors, department leaders, and fellow department members were factors that significantly supported RP implementation. Having a department chair who is a “very restorative person” can be a supporting factor, “as it gives people a sense they can approach this person with a problem, and the focus is not going to be on, what did you do wrong, but rather, how can we solve this?” (P2). The team with whom you work can be a supporting factor when they are “more willing to attempt RP as the first line of defense, if there is an issue or concern with a student, before going to a punitive consequence or something that will stigmatize and shame the student” (P5). It is important that there are people around you can “access who are like-minded with you, and with whom you can talk and ask advise” (P1).

Other factors perceived to enhance implementation included course curriculum, class size and structure of the room. The blend of RP with courses in which curriculum focuses on communication, language acquisition skills, and/or problem solving creates a “nice marriage” (P1) that lends itself to frequent, if not daily, use of RP. For example, P3 teaches the Site

Training Employment Programs and Services class in which they learn mostly soft skills- how to have a good attitude, how to communicate effectively and appropriately, how to get along with others, etc., so this type of learning “supports the use of RP very nicely”(P2). Besides finding a nice fit for RP in course curriculum, class size and structure of the classroom can support implementation. With a class size that ranges from 5-10 students in class, P2 find this “small group makes a difference- very easy to implement RP.” Similarly, P3 finds the smaller numbers in one of her classes allows for a “U” formation with only a couple extra sets of seats in the middle. This structure is very conducive to setting up a “quick circle in which students can sit and relax... and do check-in go-arounds, or to have deeper and more meaningful discussions that form a tight knit group” (P3).

Another factor perceived to support implementation is when RP is a “natural fit” to one’s personality and teaching style “I think, when you are more “restorative” in nature, it is much easier. For a lot of us, it’s how we already dealt with situations, so we never felt like RP was an “add on” to our daily practice...just a better way to do what we’ve already been doing” (P5). If a teacher is already seeking ways to encourage a “connection with kids to make them realize it’s safe to share things”, then the adoption of RP is easy as it “allows that to be done in a safe manner, so students can share opinions and be listened to because it matters” (P3).

Lastly, data was identified as something that supports the use of RP because it gives evidence of positive trends in discipline and academics (P4), and teachers are encouraged by the fact that what they are doing appears to be making a difference, so more likely to continue implementation. This is a clear illustration of what McIntosh, et al, (2009) hypothesized as “perceived effectiveness” of practice.

What are the perceived factors impeding the use of Restorative Practices in this setting?

Table 5 summarizes the perceived factors that support of RP implementation in order by number of participants who identified each barrier.

Table 5

Perceived Barriers That Impede RP Implementation	# out of 6 Participants Who Identified Barrier
Lack of Adequate Professional Development	6
Lack of Time	4
Imbedded Beliefs and Attitudes Contrary to Tenets of RP	4
Curriculum and class size & structure incompatible to RP	3
Lack of parent and community engagement	2
Lack of adequate data analysis	1

The barrier most frequently identified by participants was lack of adequate &/or effective professional development. While initial training occurred in the first two years of implementation, no additional professional development has been offered as a “refresher” to bolster fidelity of implementation for those already trained. Initial training was provided for new teachers during the later part of the second semester. Unfortunately, there was “so much going on at that time of the year”(P4), and because training occurred at such an inopportune time, many teachers “thought it was not a good use of their time...so it’s uncertain how much was gotten out of this training” (P4). While having new teachers and staff trained helps “to avoid bumps in the road... it is even more important for professional development to be an ongoing process” (P5), during which “the value of RP needs to be shared amongst staff” (P3). In light of the positive outcomes that have been actualized as a result of RP implementation to-date, the “ground is fertile for RP to take root...if time and other resources are not spent to do some sort of maintenance, a great opportunity for sustainability will be lost” (P6). The idea of spending time on this effort might not be readily embraced, however, as this resource is scarce. It is constantly being exhausted by the plethora of professional pressures and expectations teachers

must deal with including Keystone testing; meeting common core curriculum standards; and coping with increased challenges relative to the new teacher evaluation system. Consequently, it is not uncommon then, for RP to be perceived as “just one more thing to do, so when the door closes, they don’t do it, but just say they do” (P1). From an administrative level, there’s “not always time to sit and talk with students the way one wants because there’s always too much going on, and processes like Restorative Conferences take a lot of time to be done correctly” (P4). Unless it “can be regularly integrated as best practice”(P6), it will be hard to “shake the idea that RP is an *additional* way of dealing with things”, and grasp the idea that it “should be *the way we handle things with a common language and technique*” (P5).

Imbedded attitudes and beliefs contrary to the tenets of Restorative Practices were also perceived as additional impediments to RP implementation. For example, P3 strongly believes the current “generation’s dominating belief that fighting is the way to solve problems” presents a huge challenge to overcome... however RP can help them understand that...so knowing how to take advantage of those teachable moments can be so effective” (P3). A belief that punitive measures are the best method to deal with negative behavior is “ingrained in our society and is still more naturally the “go to” response for many. This attitude is a huge barrier that makes RP implementation more difficult” (P6). This same belief can hinder restorative teamwork in response to behavioral incidences. Some guidance counselors hold on to the belief that student service staff and assistant principal are their own entity and “never the twain shall meet” (P4). The idea that guidance is the “good cop”, and the assistant principal the “bad cop”, is not the way things should work. It should be “more about conversations”, and guidance counselors working “in tandem *with* the administrator to help avoid the need for punitive action” (P4).

While curriculum, class size, and structure of the classroom were presented as supports, they were conversely recognized as barriers. For P2, who regularly teaches 5-10 student in a class, it's hard to imagine "how teachers do it with 32 students in a class, and with very little room" (P2). In comparison to her smaller class, P3 has other classes that are larger, and more diverse, so the use academic circles are most common. While the desks are arranged in a "U" formation, there are several sets of desks in the center of the "U" to accommodate the larger number of students. Because of this, students have to stand in a circle along the perimeter of the room. They are "responsive when in circle, but not as open to expressing themselves as in the smaller class." Similarly, when an instructor is in "a gym class with 40 kids, trying to do a circle isn't always practical or productive, and to force it just makes people more resistant" (P1).

Lack of community &/or parent engagement in Restorative Practices is also a perceived barrier to implementation. For example, P2 emphasized the disadvantage associated with lack of student exposure to a "more community holistic restorative approach including things like counseling, after-school programs, churches, and law enforcement." If more students and parents were informed about and actively engaged in promoting RP, "the more likely it would be for them to advocate using restorative alternatives when dealing with problematic situations" (P6). Finally, data on discipline and grades has been tracked for the last 4 years. However, P4 implied doubt in the adequacy of this data &/or the efficiency with which this data might be analyzed to contribute to informed decisions about implementation of programs, as there may be a need to "break it down more"(P4).

Based on Freedom's current implementation practices, what is the relative probability for long-term sustainability?

Juxtaposition of this study's results with what current research tells us about factors effecting sustainability of school-based practices is presented in Table 6. Included in the table are footnotes that clarify how the factors impacting RP sustainability and other positive behavior support programs were generalized from the four hypothesized factors presented by McIntosh, et al (2009).

Table 6

Research-based Factors Supporting Sustainability of SWPBS	Supporting Factors Existing at FHS	Barriers/Impeding Factors Existing at FHS
Fidelity of implementation		Moderate fidelity
Administrative support (1)	Administrative Support (1) pr = 6 Access to faculty members who are strong "restorative role-models" (1) pr = 3	Imbedded Beliefs and Attitudes Contrary to Tenets of RP (1) pr = 3
Effective teaming (2)	Team Collaboration and Support (1, 2) pr = 4	Imbedded Beliefs and Attitudes Contrary to Tenets of RP (1)
Use of data-based decision making (4)	Access to data to track progress (4) pr = 1	Lack of adequate data analysis (4) pr = 1
Extent to which SWPBS is understood and accepted as typical practice and integrated into other school initiatives (1,3)	Curriculum and class size & structure compatible to RP (1) pr = 3 A sense that RP is a natural fit-easily integrated into daily practice (1, 3) pr = 3	Lack of Time (1, 3) pr = 4 Curriculum and class size & structure incompatible to RP (1, 3) pr = 3
On-going professional development (4)		Lack of effective professional development (4) pr = 6
Stakeholder involvement (2)		Lack of parent and community engagement (2) pr = 2

(n) = Any one of the 4 hypothesized factors proposed in McIntosh's model of sustainability of school-based practices in which the interrelated feature is included (McIntosh, et al., 2013)

- (1) **Priority**; acts on sustainability by increasing likelihood that school personnel will engage in implementation activities instead of competing tasks. Key variables include: staff commitment (buy-in and support), administrative support, integration into existing and new efforts, ongoing resources.
- (2) **Effectiveness**; fidelity increases when implementation efforts are positively reinforced by improved outcomes (i.e. student behavior). Key variables include: perceived effectiveness, implementer skill and knowledge, teaming
- (3) **Efficiency**; regards the effect to which practice can be easily integrated into teachers' existing jobs, given many competing demands. Practice perceived as part of daily routine becomes less reliant on external resources & implementation costs may decrease.
- (4) **Continuous Regeneration**; ongoing data-driven adaptation of the practice to improve contextual fit within changing context & capacity building (coaching & professional development)

pr = # of participant responses

At first glance, the outlook for sustained implementation looks bleak in view of the barriers that outweigh the supports. Parent involvement was found by McIntosh, et al. (2014) to be one of two critical features statistically more significant to sustainability than initial implementation. Freedom's apparent underutilization of this valuable resource is disconcerting as "failure to actively engage parents after initial implementation may damage durability and effectiveness" (McIntosh, et al., 2014). Bambara, et al. (2009) concur that "family participation is a critical enabler" in sustaining practice. The other critical factor found to be statistically significant for sustainability by McIntosh, et al., (2014) was SWPBS being viewed as part of systems that are already in place (as opposed to being an "add-on"). Curriculum, class size and structure compatible to RP were identified as a supporting factor for implementation at FHS, but undermined by the fact that these supports were conversely mirrored as barriers along with lack of time. A dominant barrier that exists at FHS without a supportive counter balance was lack of effective professional development. Ongoing professional development builds personnel capacity by promoting a sense that staff "are part of a larger organization- one that will support them through regular meetings, ongoing coaching, and support networks" (McIntosh, et al., 2013), so without it continuous regeneration is threatened. Additionally, the same research team found School Team Functioning, especially the use of data for decision-making, had the strongest independent association with sustained implementation, implying that "schools with less supportive administrators can sustain SWPBS as long as the team continues to function properly" (McIntosh, et al., 2013). The converse of this exists in the case of FHS, as an effective system for using data for decision-making was not reliably evidenced in the results of the current study on its implementation. However, the results of this study indicate there a significant, *collective* amount of administrative and staff support, team collaboration, and access to strong

RP role-models existing at Freedom that might serve to counterbalance some of the aforementioned deficiencies. Furthermore, fidelity of implementation is the critical component to sustainability, because without it positive outcomes “may not be observed, and the risk of abandonment increases” (McIntosh, et al. 2014). While Freedom’s moderate fidelity implies a threat to sustainability, participant responses suggest there are significant positive perceived outcomes being attributed to RP implementation, and therein lies a potential counter to this threat.

LIMITATIONS

Obvious limitations to this research are inherent in the study sample. Rationale behind utilizing convenience selection and limiting the size of the sample was reasonable. Furthermore, the poor response to the investigators initial invitation to participate in the study, plus time constraints in which the investigator had to work, explains the choice to “settle” on utilizing the only 6 participants that replied, including herself (a reason for concern at the onset of this study). However, both the size and demographics of the sample gave reason to question the reliability of results. The demographics of years of experience, gender, and average # student per class were relatively representative of the total population. However, the subject areas of all teacher participants were highly compatible to RP. Therefore, perspective from the population of teachers for which this was not the case was grossly underrepresented. Guiding Question # 3 was utilized as a means to compensate for this limitation by collecting data relative to occurrences of RP outside of each participant’s daily practice, however, these observations were also subject to bias as some of the occurrences noted were situations in which the participants shared. Level of Training could also be considered a limitation. Three out of the 6 participants, including the

primary investigator, had completed multiple graduate level classes as part of the master's degree program in Restorative Practices, thereby increasing the chance for participant bias and overrepresentation of high fidelity implementation in response to research questions. Moreover, it must be recalled that these 6 participants were named along side only 6 other faculty members by the principal as those from a total of 110 faculty members (11%) to be observed, or perceived, to be implementing RP with "some degree" of fidelity. Data collection from the other 89% of the faculty might reveal significantly different results, thereby necessitating investigation of a much larger and diverse sample.

Another significant limitation to this study was the use of a "Self-Assessment Survey". Ratings are dependent on the level of participant objectivity. It is not uncommon in this type of self-evaluation for respondents to overinflate their ratings. Student surveys would have been useful in identifying mismatches in perceptions, but were not included in the data collection design due to systemic restraints identified earlier in the report. Instead, the use of in depth interviews was utilized to provide qualitative data that might corroborate the quantitative results, thereby increasing the chance to for the findings to be somewhat representative of the larger faculty population. Additionally, for the purpose of combining quantitative and qualitative data ratings were balanced by giving more weight to the dominant end of each rating.

In consideration of all the aforementioned limitations, a tenable conclusion is that the overall rating of 'moderate' fidelity derived from data analysis might be an inflation of the *actual* level of fidelity in general population of Freedom's faculty, so more likely to be occurring at a "low" level of fidelity. As stated at the onset of this report, sustainability of school-based practices is actualized when fidelity of practice is *maintained* throughout, or in spite of inevitable changes that occur in within the context of the school environment, and positive outcomes are actualized

in the long term. If fidelity of RP implementation at Freedom High School is more likely “moderate-to-low”, than it is not being “maintained” and the significant positive outcomes perceived by a very small sample of the overall population will more than likely diminish “in the long term.”

IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Staying true to Ferrance’s model for action research (Ferrance, 2000), this investigator identified a problem, collected and organized data, and interpreted the data to validate the existence of deficiencies in the level of RP implementation at Freedom High that threaten its sustainability. McIntosh et al., (2014), found some barriers to SWPBS (e.g. competing initiatives, personnel turnover, lack of resources like time and money) are “omnipresent and will always exist in schools, threatening sustainability” (p. 40). However, this same group also emphasize that findings reflect a perception that having access to a committed administrator and a skilled school team willing to take concrete and strategic steps to over come barriers was consistently perceived as more important to sustainability than the lack of adequate resources, or opposition were to impeding it (McIntosh, et al., 2014). This is encouraging as Freedom possesses the very assets McIntosh, et al. (2014) propose can outweigh the barriers, if invested purposefully. The implication therein is for this investigator to act on the evidence uncovered during the first three steps in this study’s cycle of inquiry by arranging a meeting with Freedom’s administrative team with a purpose to share the findings. From there, the administrative team can move to reflecting on, and analyzing, the results, and subsequently plan their next steps on the path towards increasing fidelity of RP implementation.

Based on the finding of this action research study, it is highly recommended that next steps include a replication of the methods used in this study on a school-wide scale in order to gain deeper, and more reliable insight into staff and student perceptions about RP implementation including fidelity of practice; perceived outcomes; and the factors either supporting or impeding implementation. Secondly, serious attention must be given to the need for an increased in professional development opportunities. Moreover, there needs to be a renewed commitment to planning for more effective and efficient use of professional learning groups (PLGs), as the vehicle through which staff can make data-based decisions about how to adapt daily practice as needed to improve student outcomes. Finally, it is important to take steps to increase student and parent knowledge of RP, and its overall impact on the school since initial implementation. At the same time, they must be provided opportunities to be more actively engaged in promoting and/or empowered to implement these practices with the context of school, community, and at home.

Appendix A

The interview process was guided by the following prompts/questions:

1. Describe your history of training in Restorative Practices.
2. Explain and/or describe how you apply your knowledge of Restorative Practices to your daily professional practices at Freedom High School?
3. Besides the restorative practices you implement in your own classroom, what other restorative processes have you either observed, or taken part in at Freedom High School?
4. What outcomes have occurred as a result of the use of Restorative Practices in this setting?
5. What factors exist that support the use of Restorative Practices in this setting?
6. What, if any, are the barriers that impede the use of Restorative Practices in this setting?

Appendix B

Element 3A: Small Impromptu Conferences (SW)**Responses****

Element Characteristics	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	GM
When addressing misbehaviors between students, I structure the conversation using the restorative questions.	4	4	3	2	5	5	
I facilitate small impromptu conferences when a lower level incident occurs.	3	4	3	2	5	5	
When facilitating a small impromptu conference, I encourage students to do most of the talking.	3	4	5	4	5	5	
I encourage students to use affective statements in response to the restorative questions.	4	3	4	2	5	4	
I ask students to take specific actions to repair the harm.	4	3	4	3	5	5	
I use a respectful tone and avoid lecturing.	4	4	4	4	5	5	
Participants' Individual and Group Mean (GM) Scores for Element 3	3.7	3.7	3.8	2.8	5	4.9	4.0

Performance scale 1=not at all- 2= rarely (low) 3=sometimes (moderate) 4=often- 5=always(high)

Element 3B**Small Impromptu Conferences****P1 P2 P3 P4 P5 P6**

# of Impromptu Conferences ran in last 6 months	2	7	2	100	30	20
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Element 6A**Restorative Conferences (T)****Responses (*Original response of "NA")**

Element Characteristics	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	GM
I consistently follow the script.	3	4	5	1	5	1*	
I keep my personal views and needs separate from the conferencing process.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
I acknowledge and disapprove of harmful behavior.	3	4	5	1	5	1*	
I value all participants who are involved.	3	5	4	1	5	1*	
I allow for free expression of emotions.	3	5	5	1	5	1*	
I ensure that the conference stays focused on the incident.	3	4	5	1	5	1*	
I allow participants to develop their own solutions to the harm resulting fro the incident.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
I encourage clear agreements.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
I encourage others to separate the deed from the doer in the conference process.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
In the conference I facilitated, the wrongdoer was reintegrated into the community.	4	4	4	1	5	1*	
Participants' Individual and Group Mean (GM) Scores for Element 6	3.1	4.2	4.4	1	5	1*	3.1

Performance scale 1=not at all- 2=rarely (low) 3=sometimes (moderate) 4=often- 5=always (high)

Element 6B

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Avg. # of restorative conferences ran per mo. in the last 6 months.	4	0	1	0	1	0

Element 9

A Restorative Staff Community (SW)

Responses (*Original response of "NA")

Element Characteristics	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	GM
I use affective statements with other staff members.	3	1*	4	4	4	4	
I use restorative questions to resolve staff conflicts and repair harm done to staff relationships.	4	1*	2	1	4	4	
We use proactive circles to build healthy staff community.	3	1*	1	1	5	3	
We use responsive circles to deal with conflicts that arise among staff members.	3	1*	1	1	4	3	
We use fair process in situations where participatory decision-making is appropriate.	3	1*	2	1	4	4	
The administration models restorative practices.	3	1*	3	1	5	3	
I have a deep understanding of the fundamental hypothesis and how it relates to the other essential elements.	3	1*	3	1	5	5	
I think as a staff we meet the criteria of a high quality restorative community.	3	1*	3	1	3	3	
Participants' Individual and Group Mean (GM) Scores for Element 9	3.1	1	2.4	1.4	4.3	3.6	2.6

Performance scale 1=not at all- 2=rarely (low) 3=sometimes (moderate) 4=often- 5=always (high)

Appendix C

Alphanumeric Coding and Parenthetical Notation Utilized For Analysis of Qualitative Data.

GQ2: P1-re15

Utilizes Restorative Practices (RP) *everyday in class.* (High-level implementation)

Chairs are set up in a circle. That helps facilitate discussion, helps people make eye contact, and

(Proactive Circles)

really creates an environment that affords the ability to utilize RP effectively. (E4), so when

(Responsive circles)

there is an incident in class, it's not foreign to the kids to sit in a circle and discuss (E5)

I've had an instance in my class where students tended to gravitate to the people they were most

(RC-encourage students to take responsibility for own behavior)

comfortable with...and they too noticed and brought it to my attention... (E5-c10).

GQ2: P2-se30

... I only have about 5-10 students in class, so it's a small group and this makes a difference-

very easy for me (supporting factor) I don't know how teachers do it with 32 students in a class, and

with very little room (impeding factor). I teach the Site Training Employment Programs and

Services class in which they are learning mostly soft skills...so my curriculum support the use of

RP very nicely (supporting factor)...I've only taken one issue to administration this year... and

(A Restorative Approach with Families-administrator models RP)

(A Restorative Staff Community)

the AP brought it back restoratively(E9-c6) by getting the counselor and parent involved (E10)

(Small Impromptu Conferences)

so widened the circle a bit more (E4) than I was able to, and the outcome was positive.

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