

Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools

Summary Findings from Interviews
with Experts

Sarah Guckenburg
Nancy Hurley
Hannah Persson
Trevor Fronius
Anthony Petrosino

October 2015



The WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center highlights the rigorous research and evaluation work that WestEd researchers are conducting in the areas of school safety, violence and crime prevention, juvenile and criminal justice, and public health. A primary goal of the Center is to become a trusted source of evidence on the effects of policies and programs in these areas.

In addition to conducting research and evaluation studies, Center staff promote the use of scientific evidence in making decisions about programs, policies, and practices relevant to justice and prevention.

For more information, visit <http://jprc.wested.org/>

WestEd — a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency — works with education and other communities throughout the United States and abroad to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has more than a dozen offices nationwide, from Massachusetts, Vermont and Georgia, to Illinois, Arizona and California, with headquarters in San Francisco. For more information about WestEd, visit WestEd.org; call 415.565.3000 or, toll-free, (877) 4-WestEd; or write: WestEd / 730 Harrison Street / San Francisco, CA 94107-1242.

© 2015 WestEd. All rights reserved.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for funding this project, and for the assistance of our program officers: Drs. Brenda Henry, Kerry Ann McGeary, and Tracy Costigan. We also express our gratitude to all the experts who took the time to participate in interviews and shared their stories, resources, and ideas about implementing restorative justice in schools. (Appendix A provides a list of interview participants.) We thank Susan Mundry of WestEd for her support and for contributing in-kind resources to support the completion of this project. We also thank the following persons for their assistance or comments: Fredrika Baer, Julie Colton, Lindy Wolf, Meagan O'Malley, and Noel White.

Table of Contents

Overview and Methods	1
Findings from Interviews with Experts	3
Current Work Related to Restorative Justice in Schools	3
Failure of traditional and zero-tolerance disciplinary approaches to improve U.S. schools	4
Disciplinary disparities among minority groups fueling a school-to-prison pipeline	4
Increasing concerns about school climate/culture	4
Desire to encourage a holistic community approach to serving youth	5
Interest in exploring connections to other youth development models	5
Defining Restorative Justice in Schools	6
Focus on repairing harm rather than punishing the offender	6
Include the student voice in the process	6
Integrate a whole-school approach	7
Incorporate practices and strategies to build students' social/emotional skills	7
Key Practices of Restorative Justice in Schools	8
Successes and Challenges of Implementing Restorative Justice in Schools	9
Successes	9
Challenges	11
Suggestions for Future Research on Restorative Justice in Schools	14
Summary and Implications	15
Appendix A: Experts Interviewed for This Report	17
Appendix B: Protocol for the Expert Interviews	18

Overview and Methods

This report is part of a larger body of work by the WestEd Justice and Prevention Research Center focusing on restorative justice (RJ)¹ as an alternative to traditional responses to student misbehavior in schools across the United States. This work seeks to document the current breadth of evidence on the subject, provide a more comprehensive picture of how RJ practices are implemented in schools, and lay the groundwork for future research, implementation, and policy. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) funded WestEd beginning in 2013 to conduct research to identify current themes and issues about implementing and sustaining RJ in schools.

To gather data on RJ practices and issues, WestEd conducted a comprehensive review of the literature, interviewed experts in the field of RJ (people recognized nationally for their expertise on RJ in schools), and surveyed and/or interviewed RJ practitioners currently working with or in U.S. schools. This report presents a summary of 43 interviews we conducted with experts in RJ between January and October 2014. We initially identified these experts through a literature search of RJ in schools, supplemented by online searches. We used a snowball sampling technique to identify more experts by asking each individual we interviewed for recommendations of other people in the field to contact. We then analyzed interview notes to identify and categorize common themes. Although RJ has been practiced in schools in other nations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, we focused this report on RJ in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Most of the experts we interviewed work in the United States. Appendix A provides a list of experts we interviewed.

Four WestEd staff conducted the interviews by telephone; each interview lasted about one hour. Using a semistructured protocol (see Appendix B), interviewers asked the experts about their background and experience, how they define RJ in their work, what successes and challenges they had experienced implementing RJ in schools, and what additional research is needed in the field. WestEd staff also conducted an informal focus group with 15 experts and practitioners of RJ in schools who were attending the University of Vermont's Annual Conference "Restorative Justice, Responsive Regulation and Complex Problems" in July 2014. We incorporated the focus group feedback into this report of interviews with experts.

We present the main findings from the interviews under the following topic areas:

¹ We use the term "restorative justice" (RJ) to capture what interviewees described using a variety of terms such as "restorative practices," "restorative approaches," and other similar language.

- Current work related to restorative justice in schools
- Defining restorative justice in schools
- Key practices of restorative justice in schools
- Successes and challenges of implementing restorative justice in schools
- Suggestions for future research on restorative justice in schools

For each topic area we have included some relevant quotes from the interviews. To protect the confidentiality of those we interviewed, we do not use any quotes that would identify an expert.

Findings from Interviews with Experts

Current Work Related to Restorative Justice in Schools

We found that experts on RJ in schools come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Among the individuals we interviewed, some are researchers and academics in criminal justice or education and have done research or evaluations on RJ in schools. Others are technical assistance providers working with schools and districts to train educators to implement RJ in those settings. The experts in our sample work in many fields of study, including school psychology, school mental health, school climate, social justice in schools, school violence, health care, social services, criminal justice, and research and evaluation. Many experts have a background in community-based RJ programs and are now working to translate this implementation into school settings. Others have had prior experience working in juvenile and/or adult custodial institutions and see the application of RJ in K–12 education as a potentially positive alternative to school systems referring youth to the criminal justice system.

“Juvenile justice has a 100-year or more history of focusing on the offender. Now [it] has to change its focus to include a focus on victims. [RJ] has shifted the spotlight from the offender to the victims and the harm they suffered.”

The experts we interviewed widely agree that current methods of handling student offenses are often not effective, and may even be backfiring. When specifically asked why they were focused on RJ in schools, several experts noted the history and success of this approach in community and justice settings, and expressed high hopes for a similar impact on student disciplinary methods used in U.S. schools.

“Schools are becoming more aware that zero-tolerance policies are bad for students.”

When asked what motivated them to work on RJ in schools, experts offered responses that can be grouped into the following five reasons:

- Failure of traditional and zero-tolerance disciplinary approaches to improve U.S. schools
- Disciplinary disparities among minority groups fueling a school-to-prison pipeline
- Increasing concerns about school climate/culture

- Desire to encourage a holistic community approach to serving youth
- Interest in exploring connections to other youth development models (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, Response to Intervention, Social and Emotional Learning)

Each of these reasons is described in detail below.

Failure of traditional and zero-tolerance disciplinary approaches to improve U.S. schools

Some experts were introduced to RJ through Howard Zehr's writings² in which he advocated for a shift in how to deal with offenses, offenders, and victims. This shift included more focus on the harm caused by the offense and how to repair the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, rather than on how to punish the offender. Several experts stated they were influenced by Zehr's writings, particularly as they began to apply RJ to schools. Other experts mentioned being influenced by the religion they were raised in (e.g., Quaker) or by studying traditional practices of indigenous peoples in the United States and in other nations (Native Americans, Aboriginal Tribes). In both cases, experts noted the emphasis was on moving past punishment to repairing harm and restoring relationships. Also, several experts mentioned being influenced by writings about RJ implementation in other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

Disciplinary disparities among minority groups fueling a school-to-prison pipeline

Many schools in the United States have been looking to RJ as an alternative form of discipline to address the disproportionate rates at which students of color and students with disabilities in U.S. public schools are written up for detention or suspension or are expelled. The zero-tolerance policies and other current discipline policies in the majority of U.S. public schools have led to what is known as the "school-to-prison pipeline," particularly for minority students. Several experts, especially those conducting research on this disparity, noted it as the very reason they were drawn to restorative justice, and emphasized the need to focus on racial injustice and disparity in schools. Some experts are working with school districts to help change discipline policies and incorporate RJ into student conduct codes or school discipline codes to address this issue.

Increasing concerns about school climate/culture

Experts related that their own growing concern about school climate was another reason they were focused on RJ in schools. Several stated that they want to help teachers learn to build trust with their students and shift the focus from punishment of student offenses to prevention and "community building." Although experts acknowledged the initial investment of time and funding necessary for school personnel to implement RJ (to be

² Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Intercourse, PA: Good Reads.

discussed further in the “Challenges” section), several emphasized the long-term payoff of building a school culture that values student voice and positive relationships among students and staff. Interviewees also gave examples of incorporating RJ practices to teach classroom content and social and emotional skills to students. They described how teachers are managing classrooms using RJ strategies, such as “proactive” circles, to discuss certain subject matter. Experts stated that when teachers used these methods and encouraged students to share their perspectives, it helped establish norms for the classroom that were useful for dealing with issues beyond discipline.

Desire to encourage a holistic community approach to serving youth

According to those we interviewed, RJ practices are often being used in the broader community context in which the school is located, involving a wide range of government institutions and nonprofit organizations (such as juvenile courts, etc.). There is little evidence yet on the impact of these broader RJ community efforts, and even less evidence related to their impact on schools. Several experts expressed optimism that their efforts in working to bring organizations and schools together around RJ will eventually help to break down silos in communities, increase the positive impact of RJ in schools, and reduce the school-to-prison pipeline. Experts mentioned that with RJ integrated into both the community and the schools, youth and families receive the same messages in and out of school. This may enable schools to refer youth to a community RJ “board” to handle an offense.

Interest in exploring connections to other youth development models

Some experts noted the similarities between RJ and other initiatives focused on improving school climate and safety, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). PBIS is

“ . . . a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. PBIS IS NOT a packaged curriculum, scripted intervention, or manualized strategy. PBIS IS a prevention-oriented way for school personnel to (a) organize evidence-based practices, (b) improve their implementation of those practices, and (c) maximize academic and social behavior outcomes for students. PBIS supports the success of ALL students.”³

Experts noted the need for more research on the relationship between PBIS and RJ. Some shared the belief that RJ in conjunction with this and other initiatives has the potential to lead to improvements in school climate and in relationships among students and staff in schools.

³ Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) Technical Assistance Website, <https://www.pbis.org/>

Defining Restorative Justice in Schools

Our early work on this topic confirmed that restorative justice is difficult to define. Because of this difficulty, we asked experts to describe key features that they think are important to implementing RJ in schools. Their responses indicated four key features:

- Focus on repairing harm rather than punishing the offender
- Include the student voice in the process
- Integrate a whole-school approach
- Incorporate practices and strategies to build students' social/emotional skills

"This is a shift in what justice means ... acknowledging something wrong was done. There needs to be an effort by the entire community to make the harm right. The school community needs to work together to hold the person accountable."

Focus on repairing harm rather than punishing the offender

Many experts shared the perspective that RJ is first and foremost about repairing the harm caused by a student's offense. The RJ emphasis is on rebuilding relationships, collaboratively solving problems to address this harm, and not on punishing the offender.

"RJ is a way of treating students the way we want our own child to be treated in any setting."

Include the student voice in the process

Experts stated an important benefit of RJ in schools is that it creates an environment in which the student voice is valued. This characteristic is best evidenced by the RJ practice of "circles," in which participants directly address each other about the harm caused. Students and others pass a "talking piece" (an object that is meaningful, e.g., an artifact) around the circle, and only the person holding the talking piece can speak (or choose to pass) at that time. Trained facilitators conduct the RJ circles, which allow everyone to hear about and understand the harm from different points of view (victim, perpetrator, other students, teachers, parents, community

"We have to create a safe space where kids can reflect on their behavior, do something [about it], and be held accountable."

"We have to be careful about defining the needs of those affected without getting their true input."

"Attitude is the most important factor, including an understanding of the harm from the victim's perspective."

members). Some schools utilize “peace rooms” to create a safe space where circles can take place and all participants can express themselves.

“Discipline should be a teachable moment.”

Integrate a whole-school approach

Some experts noted that there are programs or models that tend to be more of a “stand-alone” disciplinary approach (i.e., not used throughout the school/district or with all students), with minimal training provided. Several experts cautioned that the stand-alone approach was not ideal and may have less positive impact than a whole-school approach. They also cautioned about simplified models that appear to be easier to implement to get buy-in from school administrators who are concerned about adding more responsibilities to their already overburdened staff.

The majority of experts agreed that RJ should be an integrated approach within a broader school culture in which everyone is using the same language and techniques. Some suggested that teachers begin to use RJ in staff meetings and with each other before it is introduced to the students. Many said that RJ is not sustainable or successful unless the entire school environment is “restorative” in its approach to students, staff, parents, and all members of the community.

“When it becomes part of the fabric of the school, and even better, the district and community as a whole, RJ has a better chance of being sustained and implemented well.”

Incorporate practices and strategies to build students’ social/emotional skills

Experts stressed that RJ is not just a way to react to student offenses, but can serve a preventative purpose when implemented in schools to avert discipline issues as well as to resolve them. In addition to being used to handle discipline, improve school culture, and even teach classroom content, experts contended that RJ can lead to skill-building for students, particularly skills relevant to social and emotional learning (e.g., how to communicate with peers and teachers, talk about situations in a calm environment, give context to situations before jumping to conclusions). Experts pointed out that when students, teachers, and the entire

“Responding to harm and repairing relationships [are] often the focus of most RJ programs, but most kids don’t have the skills to build relationships in the first place, so how are they going to repair them? You have to teach those skills.”

school community (and in some cases people beyond the school community) gain the skills, language, and processes of RJ, they contribute to the development of a more positive school culture.

Key Practices of Restorative Justice in Schools

The features listed in the previous section tend to describe the goals or philosophy of RJ programs at a somewhat general level. They describe what RJ is about, but not necessarily *how* it is implemented. When asked to identify specific RJ program components included in their model or the models they have observed, experts in our interviews mentioned the following more specific practices that are intended to achieve the goals of restorative justice:

- *Holding restorative circles* — facilitated meetings that allow students and others to come together for problem solving, resolving disciplinary issues, receiving content instruction, and discussing concerns related to difficult topics, such as violence in the community or racial tensions.
- *Restorative conferencing* — a facilitated meeting between wrongdoer and person harmed (may also include teachers and parents) to discuss the situation, harm, and solutions.
- *Providing peace rooms* — “safe spaces” created in schools where restorative circles and conferences may be held.
- *Restorative questioning* — open-ended questions used to help individuals process an incident and reach a solution.
- *Active listening* — a technique that requires the listener to restate or paraphrase what she or he heard from another in the listener’s own words.

Experts mentioned that in some cases strategies or techniques are labeled “restorative” but would not be considered true RJ strategies by some RJ proponents. For example, peer courts and peer juries, according to some experts, are not consistent with the RJ philosophy because they focus on the offender rather than the victim. The offender is still being handed a punishment (by their peers rather than by an administrator) and often without input from the victim.

*“It is a way of interaction;
it’s hard to measure and see.”*

The questions we asked about defining RJ and identifying its components led some experts to share how they think about and approach doing this work in schools. In addition to listing the components previously noted, they articulated a broad perspective of RJ in schools, describing it as

*“It’s about respect, dignity, and
care for all . . . balance. ‘I need
for you to feel what I feel.’
Schools must embrace a new
‘primary vision.’”*

being “about respect, dignity, and care for all.” Many of these experts noted that it can be difficult to observe such a broad perspective being translated into specific practices or strategies in schools. They also acknowledged that measuring the fidelity of implementation and the impact of RJ practices requires tools and methods that are still in the development stage.

Successes and Challenges of Implementing Restorative Justice in Schools

In describing the successes they experienced while implementing RJ in schools, experts referred to improved relationships in schools, improved student behavior, empowered students, and the adoption of alternatives to traditional discipline techniques that rely heavily on exclusionary methods such as suspension and expulsion. The experts often reiterated that witnessing such successes is what initially prompted them to get involved with RJ in schools.

As for challenges to implementing RJ, experts frequently mentioned issues around sustainability. They noted that if a school leader who believes in RJ leaves his or her leadership position, the implementation of RJ practices often ends. Experts mentioned other major challenges, such as the burden of time it takes for educators to implement RJ; competing priorities in schools; low initial buy-in from teachers, students, and parents; and insufficient financial support for RJ implementation. We discuss the main successes and challenges experts mentioned in more detail below.

Successes

Embracing a philosophical change in schools

Although there are considerable obstacles, some experts pointed out that when RJ is fully integrated into the school it can have a large positive impact on school culture and result in improved student and staff relationships. Some experts working with schools have encouraged them to adopt RJ as the new unifying philosophy to guide the school. As one expert put it, it is not just about “re-arranging furniture into circles, but embracing a vision.”

“RJ is a philosophy, a way to respond — to move toward healing.”

“If you don’t live RJ all day, every day, it doesn’t make a difference.”

“RJ is not about a program, but more a philosophy that emphasizes values, treating people with respect and care.”

Treating students fairly, or empowering students

For some experts, RJ is about embracing a method that will allow students to reach their fullest potential. RJ empowers students to use their voice and learn skills to deal with conflict and communicate with peers and adults. Those who have seen RJ used in a school setting spoke about the powerful effect of empowering students and witnessing the impact of the process. For example, one expert described a situation in which a student got into a fight and was referred to the “peace room” at the school. In the room, the student revealed that it was his birthday and his father did not show up to celebrate; that was the contributing factor in the aggression he was exhibiting. The student he was fighting with then shared that he had a similar experience with his father and the two students ultimately started a friendship. This information might never have been discovered if the “peace room” and RJ were not in place at this school.

“When we allow kids to make it right, they transcend the script.”

“RJ allows people to participate in this process. It also allows the victim to see the humanization and empathy of the wrongdoer; the victim sees the defendant not as a ‘monster’ or bad kid but as a full human being.”

Improving student behavior at school

One area the experts we interviewed noted as a significant success of RJ implementation in schools is a reduction in student suspensions and expulsions. Several interviewees, however, emphasized that this one measure of RJ — though important — is not enough; the intention of RJ is to change the actual behavior of students *and* the school's response to offenses. Many noted that, in their experience, teachers often “get on board” with RJ when they see it as a way to build their own relationships with students in the short term, and these relationships positively impact youth behavior over the long term.

“Every teacher who used circles somewhat regularly reported a 50 percent reduction in the time spent dealing with behavioral issues during class.”

“Using restorative circles for high impact incidents can be a transformative experience for folks; it gives them a skill for life. It can result in increased sense of efficacy for students, improved overall well-being of students, stronger sense of community, belonging, and self-confidence, a sense of resiliency, and confidence in collective wisdom.”

Improving school climate

Experts also frequently stated that the ways RJ can help shift relationships at school can ultimately improve school climate. As one expert noted, “Every situation involving punitive punishment damages staff relationships with students. Every situation with RJ improves relationships with students.” Another expert talked about how RJ has reduced stress among teachers, thereby improving the overall climate of the school. Those we interviewed also offered examples of life-changing moments for students participating in a restorative conference or circle.

More school leaders embracing RJ

Experts who have provided technical assistance to schools in the past noted that they often had to convince school leaders to try this approach.

Currently, however, some of these experts are finding administrators are more frequently contacting them after making their own determination to implement RJ to address disproportionality in discipline referrals. This shift is important, according to some experts, because the change is stemming from within the school and not from an external source.

“I think the kids who take part in a conference will never forget it. You sit with the person you harmed, hear what effect it had, hear from the community that you are a valued member, and then you have a chance to set things right. It is what schools should be about; . . . restorative conferencing is a real opportunity for reflection on what you did, what should happen. At the same time you get the message you are expected to take responsibility. [It] can change a kid’s life.”

“I was a trainer. Many schools had extremely punitive records, but progressive principals reached out to us to help.”

Challenges

Lacking adequate time and funding, and competing with other priorities

Experts pointed out that the large amount of time and funding necessary to effectively implement RJ causes resistance from teachers and principals. Many experts emphasized that RJ training for teachers and others should occur over multiple days to begin the process, and ideally include some follow-up. The cost to get all the teachers trained is a burden for schools, and some cannot afford to spend that money. It also takes time during the school day to

“RJ takes time, money, people, capacity building . . . it’s not a quick fix. It takes five to six years to achieve buy-in from all.”

“Schools need time to invest in this, but they are held accountable for test scores.”

implement RJ components, such as circles and conferencing. Schools are under pressure to devote as much time as possible to academic learning and other commitments, so it is hard for many schools to find a way to fit RJ into the school day.

Difficulty changing school culture

Experts agreed that one of the goals of RJ is to change school culture; yet most acknowledged that this goal is a challenge to implementation. As previously noted, it is not easy or quick to train all staff in the school on how to effectively implement components such as circles and conflict resolution. Principals can feel protective of their school and resist having others (e.g., consultants and technical assistance, or TA, providers) coming in to change how the school operates, especially concerning their discipline policies. Experts who provide TA on RJ also recognize that educational institutions are unfamiliar territory for some of them, that they need more knowledge about how schools operate to determine how best RJ can fit into that environment, and that they need more experience and tools. Many experts we interviewed have a background in doing RJ in a criminal justice setting and are still learning how best to adapt RJ to a school setting. They often mentioned that working within the structure and timing of a school day was challenging.

"Like any intervention in a school setting, if it happens in isolation it is not as effective. RJ [strategies] cannot be viewed as an add-on, [they] have to be integrated in the school. . . ."

"In elementary schools, you have one teacher with 30 kids for an entire year. [That teacher] almost serves as a case manager... [Then], in middle school and high school, all of a sudden you have seven teachers and no one to implement these programs."

Teachers and principals resisting RJ

Experts noted that teachers and administrators may initially resist RJ implementation. They acknowledged a variety of reasons for this resistance, including that some teachers, due to time constraints, find it easier to use the formal punishment policy ("send the youth to the office"), thereby removing a "problem youth" from the classroom. Teachers are focused on learning, and disruptions to teaching and learning create a challenge for everyone. In addition, holding conferences or circles is difficult for teachers and takes up more time initially than simply sending the youth to the office for punishment. Other experts mentioned that teacher unions could be a barrier to implementing RJ because the RJ process adds to the teachers' duties. Unfortunately, it is difficult for some administrators

"The culture of traditional punishment is very powerful in schools."

and teachers to initially see the potential long-term benefits associated with RJ, partly because of the time and dedication required up front by the entire school community.

Measuring impact

When asked about data collection instruments relevant to RJ in schools, experts for the most part knew of few such tools, though they noted that measurement tools will be needed for collecting and analyzing impact data on RJ in schools. A few experts shared that they had created an instrument geared to their own research and work. These types of tools ranged from fidelity instruments specific to the model of RJ being implemented to an observation checklist to help capture data on RJ in schools. Some experts noted that measuring RJ is challenging because RJ is “not measurable,” as it is about the overall school environment, communication, prevention, and building of positive relationships. However, many are conscious that to learn about the impact of RJ and how to implement it well, it needs to be measured and observed in a systematic and rigorous way.

Sustaining RJ

Experts we interviewed often mentioned the challenge of sustaining RJ in schools, including the challenge of acquiring the funding to support training and implementation of RJ. They noted that often, when the funding ends, so does the implementation of RJ. Sustainability also relates to leadership. As discussed earlier, some experts talked about how leadership changes at the school building level result in a shift of priorities. The implementation of RJ, once championed by a school leader, may be abandoned when that leader moves on. With regard to teacher training, many noted that the key to schools implementing RJ successfully is to have ongoing support and follow-up, not just one initial training.

“Sustainability is a big issue. What model is most sustainable? Is it that an outside consultant is always needed to run RJ? Or should it be organic, [from the] ground up, a teacher-organized model?”

“[Sustainability] is a huge challenge. . . . [I’ve] seen that happen a lot — a new administration comes in and changes it.”

Suggestions for Future Research on Restorative Justice in Schools

When asked what types of future research might advance understanding and guide next steps for successful implementation of RJ practices in schools, most experts offered at least one suggestion, and some offered multiple suggestions. We have published a full summary of this feedback in a separate report titled “What Further Research Is Needed on Restorative Justice in Schools?”⁴ Here is a brief synopsis of the findings included in that report:

- Experts suggested research to uncover the factors associated with a school’s *readiness to implement* RJ. They indicated the importance for educators to be able to identify the nature of a school’s climate, the availability of resources, and training needs, as well as the extent of community support for this undertaking prior to beginning the implementation of RJ.
- Experts recommended research to establish a *clear, concise, and largely acceptable definition* of RJ. This research should also reveal the most important components and characteristics to include in any implementation model of RJ in schools.
- Experts encouraged *rigorous outcome-based research* on implementation and effectiveness — some of which has already begun (see “What Further Research Is Needed on Restorative Justice in Schools?” for examples). Experts suggested gathering data in the places in which successful and sustainable RJ programs have been implemented to uncover the conditions that lead to replicable examples.
- Experts cited the need to research what *training and professional development* for school leaders have been implemented and proven to successfully enhance their ability to value, believe in, and implement an RJ approach to dealing with school climate and discipline concerns.

⁴ Hurley, N., Guckenburg, S., Persson, H., Fronius, T., & Petrosino, A. (2015). *What further research is needed on restorative justice in schools?* San Francisco: WestEd. Available from <http://jprc.wested.org/what-further-research-is-needed-on-restorative-justice-in-schools/>

Summary and Implications

The experts we interviewed provided important insights into the emerging area of RJ in schools. Based on the experience of these experts, we have summarized the following lessons learned and areas where new research is needed about how to implement RJ in school settings:

- According to some experts, for RJ to be most successful, it should be a whole-school, integrated approach and not an isolated program. Some experts even suggested that teachers use RJ with each other long before it is introduced to the students so it becomes part of the fabric of the school.
- For RJ to be successful in a school, it needs leadership from the principal. However, there is a danger in only having the principal champion these efforts. Teachers, students, parents, and the community also need to support this approach so that RJ is sustainable and can withstand leadership changes in the building.
- Implementing RJ in schools is not just about reducing suspensions and expulsions, it is also about changing the way students and teachers interact, giving students a voice and opportunity to change their behavior, and creating a whole-school culture that values all the individuals in the school community.
- There are also many challenges to implementing RJ in schools, such as inadequate time and funding, lack of tools for measuring impact, and difficulties sustaining implementation.
- There are opportunities and a need for more research on RJ in schools. Rigorous research is just starting to emerge, with randomized control trials under way across the country. There is also a need to evaluate the fidelity of implementation of RJ in schools and build on the limited measurement instruments that exist.

There are still many important questions to answer about RJ in school settings. Examples of those discussed by the experts we interviewed include:

- What is RJ and what is it not, and what leads to a successful and replicable implementation?
- What kinds of harm should *not* be handled through an RJ approach?

Based on the perspectives of the experts in our interviews, RJ seems to show promise in improving relationships among students and staff and therefore improve the overall school environment. RJ can be implemented as both a way to handle discipline and as a preventative approach to teach youth how to better communicate with each other. Although the experts we interviewed come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences with RJ — some studying the philosophy of RJ, others researching its implementation and

outcomes — all agreed that it can help address some of the major challenges schools face, such as disproportionality among discipline referrals and the zero-tolerance policies that contribute to a school-to-prison pipeline. However, more definitive judgment of the impact of RJ in schools must await the results of rigorous research conducted in the field.

Appendix A: Experts Interviewed for This Report

Lauren Abramson

Rita Alfred

Yolanda (Yoli) Anyon

Marilyn Armour

John Bailie

Sara Balgoyen

Lisa Bedinger

Kerri Berkowitz

Carolyn Boyes-Watson

Tom Cavanaugh

Ron Claassen

Chip Coldren

Connie Cuttle

Fania Davis

Kathy Evans

Pam Fenning

Thalia Gonzalez

Anne Gregory

Diana Hall

Hunter Hurst

Jon Kidde

Carol Lieber

Dan Losen

Paul McCold

Nancy Michaels

Brenda Morrison

Peter Newman

Jordan Nowotny

David Osher

Joan Pennell

Kay Pranis

William Preble

Elena Quintana

Nancy Riestenberg

Tom Roderick

Mara Schiff

Jill Sharkey

Sam Song

Doug Thomas

Tony Troop

Claudia Vincent

Anita Wadwha

Julie Young-Burns

Appendix B: Protocol for the Expert Interviews

1. Can you describe your current work related to restorative justice (RJ) in schools?
2. How did you get into this work?
3. How do you define RJ in your work?
4. What components do you consider to be part of an RJ model?
5. Are you aware of any data collection instruments to measure RJ in schools?
6. Do you provide restorative justice TA or training to educators?
7. What national groups or organizations do you know of or work with that focus on RJ in schools? What do they do? How do they differ?
8. What do you see as the successes and challenges of RJ in schools? (positives/negatives)
9. What future directions in research around RJ in schools would you suggest for the future?
10. Are there any other people you recommend we talk with about RJ in schools?
11. Are there any people you recommend we should send a brief survey about RJ in schools (school staff)? [Note: Survey will be electronic and will be sent out in Fall 2014.]
12. Would you be interested in being added to the list to receive our final report on RJ in schools?
13. We are conducting a literature search on RJ. Can you recommend any hard-to-find evaluation studies or research articles about RJ in schools for us to review? Or any other research?
14. Would you be willing to review our final reference list and add anything we might have missed?
15. Is there anything else you'd like to add that I did not ask you about RJ?



730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, California 94107-1242