

# Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools

**Practitioners' Perspectives**

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# Introduction

This report focuses on how practitioners are integrating restorative justice (RJ)<sup>1</sup> practices into their schools as an alternative to traditional responses to student misbehavior. The report covers how and when RJ is used in schools, and the successes and challenges schools face. Our findings are based on data from both a survey of and interviews with practitioners working to implement RJ in schools. This report reflects only the opinions of the individuals we surveyed and interviewed, not a representative sample of all possible RJ practitioners; the findings are therefore not generalizable to all schools in the nation that are implementing RJ.

The report is part of a larger body of work by the WestEd Justice and Prevention Research Center focusing on RJ practices in schools across the United States. To explore this topic, in addition to conducting the practitioner survey and interviews for this particular report, WestEd has conducted a comprehensive review of the literature and interviewed experts in the field of RJ (people who are nationally recognized for their work on RJ in schools).

The center's work includes documenting the current breadth of evidence on the subject, providing a comprehensive picture of how RJ practices are implemented in schools, and laying the groundwork for future research, implementation, and policy. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) funded WestEd beginning in 2013 to conduct research to understand the landscape on the rapid enactment of RJ in schools.

More about RJ in schools is available from the following related project reports:

- “Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: Summary Findings from Interviews with Experts”<sup>2</sup>
- “Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research Review” (forthcoming)
- “What Further Research is Needed on Restorative Justice in Schools?”<sup>3</sup>

## Survey

To gather information on RJ practitioners for this report, we administered a survey between September and December 2014. To reach practitioners, we used a snowball

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term “restorative justice” to capture references by interviewees to “restorative practices,” “restorative approaches,” and other language.

<sup>2</sup> Guckenburg, S., Hurley, N., Persson, H., Fronius, T., & Petrosino, A. (2015). *Restorative justice in U.S. schools: Summary findings from interviews with experts*. San Francisco: WestEd. Available from <http://jprc.wested.org/new-report-restorative-justice-in-u-s-schools-summary-findings/>

<sup>3</sup> 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/>

sampling technique which involved three rounds of sending the survey out. First, we asked the 43 RJ experts we had interviewed in 2014 to identify practitioners currently working with or in schools on RJ practices. Next, we provided the survey link directly to the RJ experts we had interviewed and asked them to disseminate the link through their professional affiliations and relevant contacts, and to indicate that the professional affiliates and contacts were encouraged to distribute the link directly to anyone they thought appropriate for receiving the survey. Thirdly, the survey itself asked respondents to identify other key practitioners who should receive the survey, and we emailed the survey to RJ practitioners identified by these respondents.

A total of 169 RJ practitioners completed and returned surveys for analysis. Most survey respondents were located in the United States, representing 18 states, Washington (DC), and Puerto Rico, plus one respondent from Canada. The practitioner survey can be found in Appendix B.

## Interviews

Three WestEd staff members also conducted 16 interviews with a total of 18 RJ practitioners (3 of the practitioners participated in a group interview). These practitioners were the first who responded to our request and indicated they were available to be interviewed within the project timeline. We conducted the interviews by telephone between March 2014 and March 2015 (see Appendix A for a list of the interviewed practitioners). Each interview took about one hour to complete. Using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C), we asked interviewees about their background and experience with RJ, their current role related to RJ in schools, if and how RJ is supported in the community, the relationship between RJ and other programs in the school, the types of incidents handled by RJ in the school, how RJ is defined in their school or district, and what successes and challenges they had experienced implementing RJ in schools. The practitioners who were interviewed described their experiences with RJ programs in California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Texas, Vermont, and Virginia.



# Themes from the Practitioner Survey and Interviews

We have organized the results from the survey and our summaries of the interviews by the following themes:

1. Roles of RJ practitioners
2. Where and when RJ is used
3. Components of RJ in schools
4. RJ models and reasons for using RJ in schools
5. Awareness of RJ in schools and its availability to students
6. How repeated misbehavior is handled
7. Training on RJ in schools
8. Successes implementing RJ in schools
9. Challenges/barriers to implementing RJ in schools

For each of these themes, we first present the survey results<sup>4</sup> and then provide summaries of relevant information from the interviews. Quotes from the interviews are also used throughout the report to give examples and illustrations. To protect the confidentiality of those we interviewed, we do not use any quotes that would identify a specific person.

## Roles of RJ Practitioners

### Survey Results

Survey respondents indicated that they hold a variety of roles in schools and school districts, including teacher, counselor, and administrator. Many (41%) chose “other” and identified themselves as social workers, school psychologists, community partners, RJ coaches, or professional developers (Table 1). The respondents also represent a broad range in regard to time served in their current role, with the largest percentage (40%) indicating five years or less. However, 27 percent have been in their role 6–10 years, 11 percent for 7–10 years, and 22 percent have served in their role for over 15 years (Table 2).

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<sup>4</sup> The survey administration included branching questions — that is, somewhat different questions were asked of respondents depending on whether they identified that their school used a “whole-school approach” to RJ versus those whose school used a “stand-alone model.” For the purpose of this report, the branched questions have been combined since only a small number of respondents (30) identified as having a “stand-alone model.” The results of two survey questions (3.1, 3.9) are not included in this report because only a small number of respondents (30 or fewer) answered these questions.

**Table 1. Survey respondents' current position in the school or district (Item 1.2)**

Position	N	%
<i>District leader</i>	8	5
<i>School principal</i>	15	10
<i>Assistant principal</i>	21	14
<i>Teacher</i>	24	16
<i>Counselor</i>	21	14
<i>Paraprofessional</i>	2	1
<i>Other (e.g., social worker, RJ coach, school psychologist)</i>	64	41

Note: Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

**Table 2. Length of time served in current position (Item 1.3)**

Length of time	N	%
<i>Less than a year</i>	8	5
<i>1–5 years</i>	55	35
<i>6–10 years</i>	41	27
<i>11–15 years</i>	17	11
<i>More than 15 years</i>	34	22

Survey respondents also indicated their current role in the specific RJ program in their school. Respondents could select multiple roles if more than one applied to them. Most respondents identified themselves as Facilitator (51%) or Restorative Practices Program Leader/Coordinator (45%). When asked how long they have served in this role, 75 percent answered five years or less (Table 4), indicating that this was a relatively new position for most respondents.

**Table 3. Survey respondents' roles in the restorative practices in the school (Item 1.4)**

Role	N	%
<i>Restorative practices program leader/coordinator</i>	69	45
<i>Facilitator</i>	79	51
<i>Mediation counselor</i>	38	25
<i>Other (circle keeper, coach, trainer)</i>	58	37

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

**Table 4. Length of time in restorative practices role in the school (Item 1.5)**

Length of time	N	%
<i>Less than a year</i>	17	11
<i>1–5 years</i>	99	64
<i>6 or more years</i>	37	24
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	2	1

### **Interview Results**

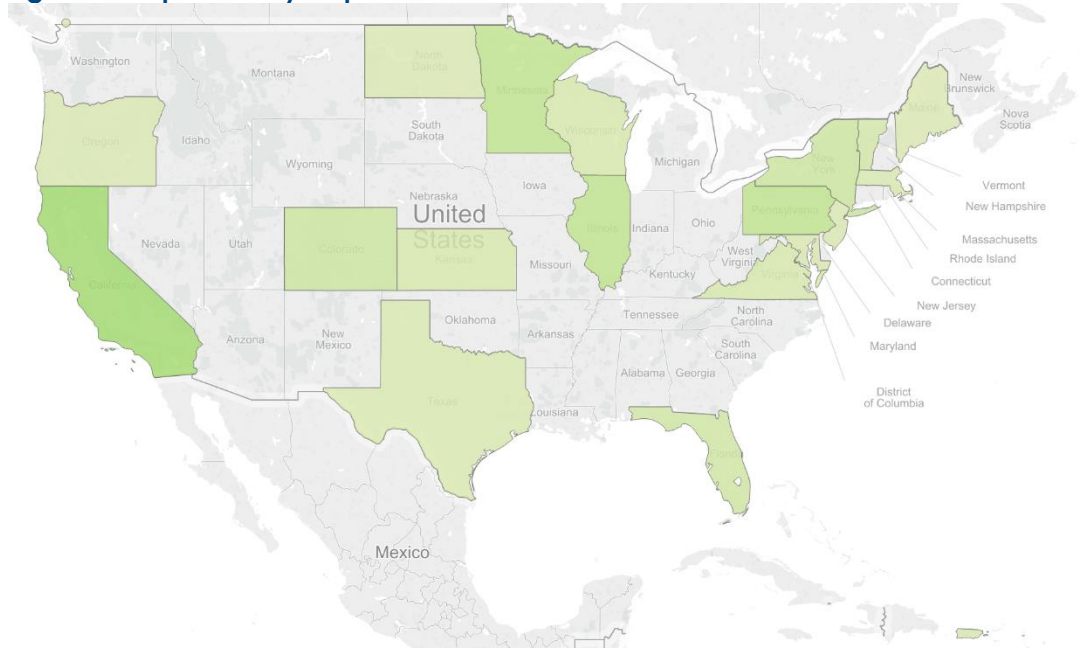
The practitioners who were interviewed hold a variety of positions in schools, and work in or with several different RJ programs/models across the country. Some practitioners reported they helped create the RJ program in their school, or specifically serve as RJ facilitators, while others lead and train teachers in RJ implementation. Some interviewees are principals or assistant principals who also conduct RJ “circles.” Practitioners were not asked during the interviews how long they have served in their current role; however, they did discuss the history of RJ in their schools, which is described in the next section.

## Where and When RJ Is Used

### **Survey Results**

Survey respondents represent schools and districts from 18 states, Washington (DC), Puerto Rico, and Canada (Figure 1). The majority of respondents indicated that they were from California (25%), Pennsylvania (12%), Illinois (12%), and Minnesota (12%). The survey data are from a small, non-random sample and cannot be considered to represent all RJ programs across the country. Instead, these data provide information on what is happening regarding RJ in schools in a selected sample of schools. When asked where RJ is implemented in the community, the two most common answers were “in more than one school” (50%) and “in the entire district” (50%). Many respondents also indicated that RJ was being used in the broader community (31%) as well as in the schools (Table 5).

**Figure 1. Map of survey respondents' locations**



Note: In addition, one respondent was located in British Columbia, Canada.

**Table 5. Locations of restorative justice programs in the community (Item 1.7)**

Restorative justice in community	N	%
<i>In more than one school</i>	77	50
<i>In the entire district</i>	54	50
<i>In the broader community</i>	48	31
<i>In one school</i>	28	18
<i>Multiple districts in the state</i>	27	17
<i>Unsure</i>	14	9
<i>Other</i>	14	9

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

To learn more about what grades RJ is implemented in, we asked respondents to check all that apply in a list of grades ranging from preK to grade 12; “districtwide” was also a response option. To better understand the grade range, we have collapsed these into four categories, preK through grade 5, grades 6 through 8, grades 9 through 12, and districtwide. RJ is most commonly implemented in grades 6 through 12 (Table 6). The survey also asked how long respondents have had an RJ program in their school (Table 7). Most respondents indicated it was a new program within the last three years (49%) with only a few respondents indicating that the program has been in place more than six years (11%), which highlights the relative infancy of RJ in many schools.

**Table 6. Grades served by restorative practices at the school(s) (Item 1.8)**

Grade	N	%
<i>PreK–Grade 5</i>	33	21
<i>Grades 6–8</i>	62	40
<i>Grades 9–12</i>	66	43
<i>Districtwide</i>	39	25

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

**Table 7. Length of time restorative practices have been implemented (Items 2.1/3.2)**

Length of program	N	%
<i>It is a new program this year</i>	13	8
<i>1–3 years</i>	60	39
<i>4–6 years</i>	49	32
<i>More than 6 years</i>	16	10
<i>Unsure</i>	11	7
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	6	4

## Interview Results

In interviews, we asked the practitioners how long they have had an RJ program in their school or district. The answers ranged from 1 year to 13 years, with the most common answer being about 4 or 5 years. RJ came to their schools through a variety of origins, most commonly as either a pilot program, part of another grant, or to address an identified problem with discipline. Some said it was an “organic process” whereby teachers became interested in RJ and were trained in it, and that it has grown to a whole-school or even districtwide approach.

We also asked interview participants to what extent RJ is supported within the community. About the same number of participants said that “RJ is only practiced in one school in the community” and “RJ is in all the schools.” A common response was about how RJ is used in the community, in the courts, and through the justice system. Some described RJ as being in its “infancy” in the community currently, and expressed the hope that interest would grow beyond the school setting. Others described how RJ had already been implemented in the community for both adults and youth before moving to the school setting.

*“When we first did this we invited other community members in and now we have peer groups and students bringing it home and using it with their families.”*

## Components of RJ in Schools

### Survey Results

To gain a clearer understanding of what RJ implementation looks like in schools, we asked survey respondents and interviewees to identify the specific components that are included in the RJ model they use. Survey respondents could choose from a list of components, as shown in Table 8, and 90 percent of those who took the survey indicated that “circles” were a component of RJ in their schools. Circles is a restorative strategy that brings everyone impacted by an incident together in a circle format for discussion.

Eighty percent of respondents indicated they use restorative questioning, a technique to defuse situations before they escalate further. RJ training often includes a list of questions to ask a student when the practitioner meets with the child directly after a conflict. These questions can be general, such as “What happened here?” or specific, such as “How can you make things better?” Most survey respondents (65%) indicated that they use one-on-one mediation, and 41 percent indicated that they use group conferencing. Far fewer respondents indicated that they use justice boards or peer juries, which may be reserved for more serious events. This finding also echoes a point we have heard from experts and practitioners, which is that there is a movement away from using terms for practices in schools that sound similar to the terms used for practices in the justice system.

To learn more about the logistics of RJ in schools and where within a school space RJ is implemented, respondents were given a range of possible answers including peace rooms, classrooms, counselor’s office, and other (respondents could check all that apply). The results (Table 9) suggest that classrooms (82%) are the most common location for RJ to be practiced in schools among the sample. However, respondents often chose “other” (60%), and when asked to specify, they indicated locations such as “administrative office,” “across the whole school,” and “conference rooms.” The “counselor’s office” was another fairly common choice (58%). However, the use of “peace rooms” in schools was noted less often (13%).

**Table 8. Components included in school’s restorative justice program (Item 1.9)**

Components	N	%
<i>Circles (academic, community building, peace, re-entry, etc.)</i>	139	90
<i>Restorative questioning</i>	123	79
<i>One-on-one mediation</i>	101	65
<i>Group conferencing (family, responding to harm, restorative conferences)</i>	64	41
<i>Other (other mediation and restorative conversations)</i>	20	13
<i>Peer jury</i>	11	7
<i>Justice boards</i>	5	3

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

**Table 9. Locations in the school where restorative practices take place (Item 1.10)**

Location	N	%
<i>Classrooms</i>	127	82
<i>Other (administrative office, across the whole school, conference room, etc.)</i>	93	60
<i>Counselor's office</i>	90	58
<i>Peace rooms</i>	20	13

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

### **Interview Results**

Similar to the survey respondents, many practitioners who were interviewed consistently stated the key component of their RJ program was discussion “circles.” In addition to using circles to address discipline or behavioral incidents, teacher practitioners also described using circles proactively as a weekly check-in with the whole class. This may give some insight as to why classrooms were the most common place RJ is practiced, according to the survey respondents. Interviewees explained the main purpose of circles is to give everyone a chance to talk without interruption; a “talking piece” is usually passed around indicating whose turn it is to share. Besides mentioning circles, interviewees most often mentioned conferencing and mediation. Peer juries and justice councils were mentioned during the interviews, although not nearly as often as circles, conferencing, and mediation.

## RJ Models and Reasons for Using RJ in Schools

### **Survey Results**

There are two common models that schools follow when implementing an RJ program. One model is to implement RJ throughout the entire school (we refer to this as the “whole-school integrated approach”), meaning that RJ is used throughout the entire school for discipline, prevention efforts, skill building, teaching classroom content, faculty meetings, etc. Another model is to implement RJ only to deal with discipline (we refer to this as the “stand-alone disciplinary approach”). When survey respondents were asked which model their school uses, 77 percent indicated their program was a whole-school model and 20 percent indicated that they have a stand-alone model (Table 10). Most experts and practitioners we have talked to prefer the whole-school integrated approach because the goal of RJ is to shift the culture, climate, and way of dealing with many aspects of school rather than just discipline.

**Table 10. Implementation of stand-alone versus whole-school restorative justice programs (Item 1.15)**

Approach	N	%
<i>Whole-school integrated approach</i>	120	77
<i>Stand-alone disciplinary approach</i>	31	20
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	4	3

We also asked respondents if they have followed an established program to implement RJ in their school or if they have used an approach that they have developed themselves. About half the respondents (48%) indicated that their school used an established program for its RJ approach (Table 11) and, when asked to identify the program, their responses included models from developers and technical assistance providers of RJ programs, curriculums, using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) models to integrate RJ, working with the school district to develop the program, or working with state departments of education to develop a program. Less than a third of the survey respondents (29%) indicated that their school used an RJ approach that they developed themselves.

**Table 11. Schools using established restorative justice programs versus developing unique approaches (Items 2.2/3.5)**

Development	N	%
<i>We developed our approach based on an established program</i>	71	48
<i>We developed the approach ourselves</i>	43	29
<i>Other</i>	21	14
<i>Unsure</i>	14	9

We asked survey respondents to indicate the reasons RJ practices were used in their schools by selecting from a list of potential choices. The most frequently selected reasons were student verbal conflict (87%), general preventative discussions (83%), and minor behavior infractions (83%) (Table 12). Bullying (72%), student/staff verbal conflicts (71%), and physical infractions (60%) were also selected by the majority of respondents. Lower rates were indicated for property infractions, student/staff physical conflicts, truancy, and alcohol/substance abuse. Other reasons included staff conflict and community building. These answers suggested that schools vary considerably in when they choose to use RJ. The top three answers — verbal conflicts, preventative discussions, and minor behavior infractions — suggest that schools are using RJ to both prevent conflict and resolve



relatively minor issues. The interview results offer additional insight into why schools may not use RJ for more serious issues.

**Table 12. Reasons for using restorative practices in the school (Items 2.5/3.6)**

Reason	N	%
<i>Student verbal conflicts</i>	134	87
<i>General preventative discussions</i>	129	83
<i>Minor behavior infraction (non-physical)</i>	129	83
<i>Bullying</i>	111	72
<i>Student/Staff verbal conflicts</i>	110	71
<i>Major infractions (physical)</i>	93	60
<i>Property infractions (vandalism)</i>	74	48
<i>Student/Staff physical conflicts</i>	69	45
<i>Truancy</i>	51	33
<i>Alcohol/Substance use</i>	42	27
<i>Other (staff conflict, community building, celebrations)</i>	31	20

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

### Interview Results

We asked practitioners what types of cases their RJ programs handle, and their answers varied. Some said that almost any discipline issue can be handled through RJ at their school. Others noted specific offenses that are never handled through RJ; these included fighting, bullying, and sexual misconduct. Of those respondents whose schools did handle bullying through RJ, one person noted that only a “highly trained” person or a person “certified” in RJ would be assigned to handle bullying. Some practitioners also said they use RJ on a case-by-case basis — one of these respondents, for example, said that RJ might be used to resolve a physical infraction (fighting) in one case, but might not be used to resolve another case involving fighting, depending on the circumstances.

*“I think there’s an opportunity for restorative work any time a relationship is broken — that can be anything; relationships between kids, teachers and kids, kids and the school, outside community, etc.”*

Interviewees offered a number of examples when asked to describe a typical RJ activity at their school. One practitioner described using RJ discussion circles on a weekly basis with no set agenda, but as an opportunity for students to talk about an issue and come to a resolution. Another example included calling for a circle when an issue or conflict arose either between students or as a classroom management technique. Both students and teachers can call for a circle. A third example categorized activities into “formal” and “informal” RJ. In an “informal” situation, RJ might be used “in the moment” to deal with a minor conflict between students. A “formal” situation might first involve the assistant principal before a decision is made to use RJ.

*“We use circles because it is a way to make sure students gain social skills, like listening, holding emotions to themselves (have to hold the talking piece). We sit in circle, we each have the same opportunity and time to speak, no pressure to talk.”*

## Awareness of RJ in Schools and Its Availability to Students

### Survey Results

On the survey, we asked respondents to indicate how aware students are about RJ in their school. Almost half of the respondents (48%) said students were aware of RJ “to some extent” (Table 13). Just under a third of the respondents (30%) said students were aware of RJ to a “great extent,” and only 6 percent said students were aware to a “very great extent.” About 14 percent said that students were either aware to a “very little extent” or “not at all” aware about RJ in their school. As indicated earlier, RJ is relatively new to many of these schools, so it is not surprising that many practitioners indicated that students were only “very little” or to “some extent” aware of RJ in the school.

**Table 13. Extent of student awareness of school's restorative justice program (Item 1.11)**

Extent	N	%
<i>Not at all</i>	2	1
<i>Very little</i>	20	13
<i>Some extent</i>	74	48
<i>Great extent</i>	47	30
<i>Very great extent</i>	9	6
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	3	2

We also asked a similar question about parental awareness of RJ in the school, as well as a question about parent involvement in RJ in schools (Table 14). Respondents most

frequently indicated that parents were aware of RJ in school to “some extent” (48%), and 16 percent indicated that parents were aware to a “great extent.” However, about 35 percent of respondents said that parents were either not aware at all or aware to a “very little extent” about RJ in the school. Parent involvement in RJ in schools followed a similar pattern according to the survey respondents. About 35 percent indicated parents were involved in RJ to “some extent”; however, the majority said that parents were either not at all involved or involved to a “very little extent” (57%). Again, given how new RJ is to many of these schools, this finding is not surprising.

**Table 14. Extent of parent awareness/involvement in school’s restorative practices (Item 1.13)**

	Parent awareness of RJ in schools		Parent involvement of RJ in schools	
	N	%	N	%
<i>Not at all</i>	13	8	31	20
<i>Very little extent</i>	41	27	57	37
<i>Some extent</i>	75	48	55	35
<i>Great extent</i>	24	16	7	5
<i>Very great extent</i>	--	--	1	1
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	2	1	4	3

Note: Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

We also asked survey respondents if RJ was available to all students in the school (Table 15). The majority of respondents (79%) indicated that RJ was available to all students; 11 percent indicated that RJ was not available to all students; and 9 percent were unsure.

**Table 15. Extent of restorative practices availability to all students in the school (Item 1.14)**

Availability to students	N	%
<i>Yes</i>	122	79
<i>No</i>	17	11
<i>Unsure</i>	14	9
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	2	1

## Interview Results

In the interviews, we asked some practitioners how aware students are of RJ in their school. Although there was not enough time to ask this question in every interview, several of the practitioners who were asked this question replied that RJ is included in

their school’s student handbook or that almost all the students in the school had experienced RJ through a discussion circle. One interviewee noted that students were included as part of the training for RJ in the school. Practitioners were not asked about parental awareness of RJ in the schools during the interview.

## How Repeated Misbehavior Is Handled

### Survey Results

On the survey, we asked two questions about how students experience RJ in schools. The first question asked what happens to a youth who has already been through the RJ program and continues to misbehave at school. Many respondents (35%) noted that the student is given another chance using the RJ approach; 22 percent specified that the student is given a traditional school sanction; and 37 percent indicated “other” (Table 16). Those who selected “other” indicated either that both options were used or that each situation is dealt with on an individual basis.

The survey also asked respondents if there was a limit to how many times a student could go through the RJ process at the school. The majority of respondents (66%) said that there was no limit to the number of times a student could go through RJ at the school, 5 percent said there was a limit, and 24 percent were unsure (Table 17). These findings illustrate the different approaches to RJ in the schools and how students experience RJ.

**Table 16. Options provided for repeated offenses (Item 3.7)**

Outcome	N	%
<i>He/She is given another chance using a restorative practices approach</i>	55	35
<i>He/She is given a traditional school sanction</i>	34	22
<i>Other</i>	57	37
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	9	6

**Table 17. Extent of limitation imposed on the number of times a youth can go through a restorative justice program (Item 3.8)**

Limit	N	%
<i>No</i>	103	66
<i>Unsure</i>	37	24
<i>Yes</i>	7	5
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	8	5

## Interview Results

Practitioners were not asked about the outcomes or limits on the number of times a student can be disciplined through an RJ approach. However, when asked to speak to the number of cases their school refers to RJ each year, one participant noted they referred over 100 so far in the school year (as of January 2015); another said they average about 150–200 per year; and one said all 9th and 10th graders participate in RJ every year. Others had a hard time answering this question and said that the school data systems do not track how many students participate in RJ or that the tracking in student data systems was not consistent.

*“What we want is for behavior to change and for students to be successful and grow as people. Whenever incidents occur, the focus of how we respond should be on what harm was done, who was affected, and how the harm will be repaired.”*

## Training on RJ in Schools

### Survey Results

A number of survey questions addressed staff training on RJ in schools. A wide range of school staff have been trained on RJ, according to survey respondents (Table 18). Respondents indicated that the following categories of staff are most often trained on RJ: “some staff” (i.e., counselors, special services, etc.) (63%), “some teachers” (50%), “principal” (48%), and “assistant principal” (46%). Even though many RJ proponents suggest that RJ should be a whole-school approach, survey respondents were less likely to indicate that “all teachers” (18%) or “all school staff” (17%) have been trained in their school.

**Table 18. School personnel trained to implement the school’s restorative justice program (Items 2.3/3.3)**

Who is trained	N	%
<i>Some staff (i.e., counselors, special services, etc.)</i>	98	63
<i>Some teachers</i>	77	50
<i>Principal</i>	74	48
<i>Assistant principal</i>	71	46
<i>Other</i>	41	27
<i>Some support staff</i>	39	25
<i>All teachers</i>	28	18
<i>All school staff</i>	27	17
<i>No one</i>	5	3

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

The survey had respondents indicate the length of time and how frequently the staff in their school receive RJ training. The length of time for training varied, with 23 percent of survey respondents indicating that staff were trained for less than a day, 15 percent indicating one full day of training, 19 percent indicating multiple days of training, and 18 percent indicating multiple days of training with ongoing support (Table 19). Twenty-one percent indicated “other,” and the responses specified by respondents who chose this category included “two days,” “as needed,” “it depends on the school,” “changes year to year,” “4 day seminar,” and “not much on RJ.”

**Table 19. Average amount of training staff receive per year (Item 2.4/3.4)**

Amount of training	N	%
<i>Less than a day</i>	35	23
<i>One day</i>	23	15
<i>Multiple days</i>	30	19
<i>Multiple days with ongoing support</i>	28	18
<i>Other</i>	32	21
<i>Missing, no answer</i>	7	5

Note: Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

In addition to asking about training, we also asked survey respondents about staff time for group reflection on RJ and how often this reflection takes place. About half the respondents (46%) noted their school or district does provide time for staff reflection on RJ (Table 20). We then asked how often the staff reflects together. Table 21 presents those

responses, showing that most respondents selected “other” (41%). In specifying “other,” respondents gave examples that indicate this time for reflecting together varies considerably, such as: “after an incident,” “2 to 3 times a year,” “as needed,” “by semester,” “formally once a year,” “ranges from weekly to monthly,” “not on a regular schedule,” and “depends on the school.”

**Table 20. Extent of time school provides for staff reflection on restorative justice in school (Item 4.1)**

Time for reflection	N	%
Yes	72	46
No	52	34
Unsure	26	17
Missing, no answer	5	3

**Table 21. Frequency of staff reflection on restorative justice in school (Item 4.2)**

Frequency	N	%
Once per quarter	12	17
Once a month	15	21
Every other week	2	3
Weekly	6	8
Daily	1	1
Unsure	6	9
Other (As needed, not regularly, infrequently)	29	41

## Interview Results

Although we did not ask practitioners during the interview a specific question about training, all of those interviewed did provide information about training on RJ in the schools. Almost all practitioners were involved in doing the training for RJ in their school or district. Many talked about their experiences training the whole school, new teachers, the leadership or school climate teams, students, and others. Some mentioned external trainings that teachers attended, or they discussed consultants who have been brought into their school to train staff. One practitioner shared that RJ had started at the school with a small group training for teachers, which led to the whole school using the RJ approach.

Some practitioners talked about the time spent on training for RJ, and many said they do a two-day training with refresher courses. Others shared the importance of ongoing training throughout the year and continuous support for teachers implementing RJ. Practitioners

spoke of the challenge to train everyone in the school on RJ and also emphasized the importance of the training.

## Successes Implementing RJ in Schools

### Survey Results

Overall, 54 percent (84) of survey respondents selected “Yes” in answer to the question asking whether their restorative justice program was successful; 5 percent (8) selected “No”; and 35 percent (54) indicated “too early to tell” (Table 22).

**Table 22. Extent of success of restorative justice program (Item 4.3)**

	Successful	N	%
Yes		84	54
<i>Too early to tell</i>		54	35
No		8	5
<i>Missing, no answer</i>		9	6

Survey respondents indicated the extent to which their RJ programs have been successful with regard to several topic areas (on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very great extent”). Respondents could also select “unsure.” Not surprisingly, and in accordance with the literature as well as our interview data, the implementation successes selected most frequently to be “very great extent” or “great extent” were “Improvement in overall school climate” (44%) and “Reduction in suspensions” (39%) (Table 23).

Twenty-seven respondents also rated the success of implementation on a category labeled “Other,” and when respondents wrote down what they meant by “Other,” the most common responses were “too early to tell/measure” or “no data collected.” (However, some respondents seemed to misunderstand the option of selecting “Other” and providing a rating for that category.)



**Table 23. Extent of success of implementation of restorative practices in schools for certain topic areas (Item 4.4)**

Topic area	Very great extent/Great extent 5/4	Some extent 3	Very little extent/Not at all 2/1	Unsure
<i>Reduction in suspensions</i> (n=143)	56 39%	39 27%	9 6%	39 27%
<i>Improvement in overall school climate</i> (n=144)	64 44%	45 31%	7 5%	28 19%
<i>Increase in academic achievement</i> (n=142)	20 14%	61 43%	12 9%	49 35%
<i>Increase in staff respect for students</i> (n=143)	51 36%	49 34%	10 7%	33 23%
<i>Increase in student respect for other students</i> (n=144)	56 39%	54 38%	7 5%	27 19%
<i>Increase in student respect for staff</i> (n=143)	50 35%	57 40%	6 4%	30 21%
<i>Increase in staff respect for each other</i> (n=142)	41 29%	49 35%	15 11%	37 26%
<i>Other (No data, too early to tell)</i> (n=27)	10 37%	3 11%	0 --	14 52%

## Interview Results

Every practitioner we interviewed noted a significant decrease in schoolwide suspensions and expulsions after the implementation of RJ. They did note, however, that though RJ cannot be credited as the cause of such drops in suspensions, they believe there is a correlation. Experts warned that even though one aim of RJ is to keep kids in school, which should lead to a reduction in suspensions and expulsions, this statistic should not be the only measure of RJ impact.

*“We want to see that RJ helps our school and our community, not just in terms of discipline but teacher retention and how we feel about our school and community. We want it to change the way we think and feel about each other and what we want to do.”*

Interviewees also pointed out that a shift away from a culture of punishment and towards a more restorative environment is resulting in improved relationships between and among students and teachers. In addition, according to several of the interviewees, the RJ programs they implement have a goal of reducing disparities in disciplinary consequences across minority student groups. Most programs have been somewhat successful with this initiative, but interviewees indicated there is still work to be done in this area.

*“Students have reported that they’re feeling more connected to their school and their classes.”*

*“We want to transform our community and produce better outcomes.”*

## Challenges/Barriers to Implementing RJ in Schools

### Survey Results

Survey respondents were asked about the challenges of implementing RJ in schools. The challenges mentioned most often by survey respondents were training needs (55%), staff buy-in (52%), and insufficient funding (36%) (Table 24). These findings mirror what we have heard from other experts and practitioners implementing RJ, especially regarding the whole-school approach model.

**Table 24. Barriers to successfully implementing restorative practices (Item 4.5)**

Barriers	N	%
<i>Training needs</i>	85	55
<i>Lack of buy-in by staff</i>	81	52
<i>Insufficient funding</i>	55	36
<i>Other (Time, mindset, sustainability)</i>	48	31
<i>Lack of administrative support</i>	29	19
<i>Resistant students</i>	29	19
<i>Lack of parent support</i>	23	15

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could select multiple responses.

### Interview Results

Participants we interviewed shared similar challenges as those indicated by the survey respondents. Many noted that to implement RJ successfully, teacher trainings need to occur often and with follow-up and time set aside for teacher reflection. They stated that having an outside consultant train teachers/staff once is not enough. Interviewees also

suggested that if external consultants cannot return frequently to assist and support teachers, then schools should have an internal RJ coordinator to fill this role.

The other challenge brought up frequently in the interviews was a lack of staff buy-in. Buy-in presents a challenge because the shift from using traditional disciplinary approaches to a restorative approach involves time, training, and support for staff.

Lack of time was also noted as a barrier to successful implementation. Interviewees spoke about how teachers in U.S. public schools are under tremendous pressure to teach their full curriculum and prepare their students for testing. RJ training and implementation take time that is not widely available in school settings.

Finally, according to interviewees, insufficient funding appears to be a problem across the country. To implement RJ well, teachers need to be trained and have the opportunity to run discussion circles in their classrooms, entailing the upfront cost of training and continued professional development, coaching, and support for teachers.

*“You need to be prepared for push back [from staff] since traditional discipline is so much easier. People don’t walk away with as much satisfaction from RJ.”*

## Limitations

There are limitations of the survey and interview data that should be considered. The sample of survey respondents is small and was limited to those identified by both experts and others working on RJ in schools. It is not a random sample, and the respondents are not a representative sample. Therefore the results cannot be generalized to a broader population. For example, 80 percent of the survey respondents said they used a whole-school approach to RJ, which may be unique to this sample and not representative. This limitation also applies to the practitioner interviews. The interview summaries in this report are based on a small sample of practitioners and are only reflective of their experience and views. Finally, we chose not to provide a definition of RJ at the start of the survey or interview. Participants had to use their own understanding of what RJ is in their experience to respond to questions.

## Conclusion

The practitioners we interviewed and those who responded to the survey provided their insights into the emerging area of RJ in schools. Based on the experiences of those interviewed and the survey data we collected, we have identified successes and challenges

resulting from the implementation of restorative justice in school settings. These include the following:

1. Most agree that discussion “circles” is the most frequently used component of an RJ program. Others also mentioned one-on-one mediation, conferencing, and restorative questioning as being important and highly effective.
2. Respondents indicated that one of the biggest successes of implementing an RJ approach is a large and rapid decrease in student suspensions and expulsions, although many noted that this decrease is expected when implementing RJ, and other measures of success are also important to track. Another outcome mentioned often is improved overall school climate.
3. Some of the most common challenges of RJ implementation include resistance from some administrators, staff, students, and parents, as well as insufficient funding, and extensive training requirements.

We have learned from both the interviews and the survey that RJ is being implemented in a wide range of schools across the country. This project has given us the opportunity to discover how schools are using RJ and the successes and challenges that come with implementation. However, as noted in our limitations section, the results of this survey are not generalizable beyond the sample. There is a great need for a larger-scale, representative survey of RJ in schools so that more can be learned about how RJ is being implemented, the impact of RJ on schools, and most importantly its impact on students. A nationally representative survey involving students, parents, practitioners, and school staff would contribute greatly to knowledge about RJ in schools.

## Appendix A: Practitioners Interviewed

We'd like to thank the following practitioners who took the time to be interviewed for this report:

Kate Brayton

Phillip Carney

Aaron Harkey

Joshua Laub

Susan Markowitz

Tracy Olson

Sung-Joon (Sunny) Pai

Oscar Reed\*

Vickie Shoap

Robert Spicer

Mike Szostak

Mary Ticiu

Tim Turley

Anita Wadwha\*\*

Christopher Weaver\*

Jamie Williams\*

Matthew Willis

David Yusem

\*Participated in a group interview

\*\*Also listed on our expert interview list

# Appendix B: RJ in Schools Survey

## Restorative Justice Survey — Copy

Q1.1 Welcome to the WestEd Restorative Practices in Schools Survey. The purpose of this survey is to help us learn about restorative practices in schools across the United States, such as where programs are being implemented, what activities or strategies are being used, and what successes and challenges have been experienced. These data will inform the work we are doing for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation on this important and timely topic. Your responses are confidential and will not be shared with anyone else, and only the WestEd research team will see your data. The survey should take only about 10 minutes to complete. We thank you for your time and efforts.

Q1.2 What is your current position in the school or district?

- District leader (1)
- School principal (2)
- Assistant principal (3)
- Teacher (4)
- Counselor (5)
- Para professional (7)
- Other (please specify) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q1.3 How long have you served in your current position?

- Less than a year (1)
- 1–5 years (2)
- 6–10 years (3)
- 11–15 years (4)
- More than 15 years (5)

Q1.4 Please describe your role in the restorative practices that take place in the school. Check all that apply.

- Restorative Practices Program Leader/Coordinator (1)
- Facilitator (2)
- Mediation counselor (3)
- Other (please specify) (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q1.5 How long have you served in this role?

- Less than a year (1)
- 1–5 years (2)
- 6 or more years (3)

Q1.6 Please identify your state and school district if applicable:

- State (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- School District(s) (2) \_\_\_\_\_

Q1.7 Where are restorative practices implemented in your community? Check all that apply.

- In one school (1)
- In more than one school (2)
- In the entire district (3)
- Multiple districts in the state (4)
- In the broader community (5)
- Unsure (7)
- Other (please specify) (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q1.8 Please identify the grades served by restorative practices at your school(s), if applicable:

- District wide (15)
- Pre-Kindergarten (1)
- Kindergarten (2)
- Grade 1 (3)
- Grade 2 (4)
- Grade 3 (5)
- Grade 4 (6)
- Grade 5 (7)
- Grade 6 (8)
- Grade 7 (9)
- Grade 8 (10)
- Grade 9 (11)
- Grade 10 (12)
- Grade 11 (13)
- Grade 12 (14)

Q1.9 Please check the components included in the restorative practices at your school(s)? Check all that apply.

- Restorative questioning (12)
- One on one mediation (1)
- Circles (please specify type) (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Group conferencing (please specify type) (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- Justice boards (8)
- Peer jury (10)
- Other (please specify) (11) \_\_\_\_\_

Q1.10 In what locations in the school do restorative practices take place?

- Peace rooms (1)
- Classrooms (2)
- Counselor's Office (3)
- Other (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q1.11 To what extent are students in your school(s) or program(s) aware of restorative practices?

- Not at all (5)
- Very little (6)
- Some extent (7)
- Great extent (10)
- Very great extent (9)

Q1.12 If students in your school(s) or program(s) know restorative practices by another name (e.g., peace circles, mediation, conferencing), please specify:

Q1.13 Please respond to the following questions.

	Not at all (1)	Very little extent (2)	Some extent (3)	Great extent (4)	Very great extent (5)
To what extent are parents aware of restorative practices in your school(s)? (25)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent are parents involved in restorative practices in your school(s)? (26)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q1.14 Are restorative practices available to all students in your school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q1.15 Some schools consider restorative practices as a stand-alone disciplinary option, while others view the practices as part of a whole-school culture integrated within everyday interactions. How would you identify your restorative practices approach at your school?

- Whole-school integrated approach (1)
- Stand-alone disciplinary approach (2)



Q2.1 How long have restorative practices been integrated at your school or district?

- It is a new program this year (1)
- 1–3 years (2)
- 4–6 years (3)
- More than 6 years (4)
- Unsure (5)

Q2.2 Is the integration of restorative practices at your school based on an established program or an approach you developed yourselves?

- We developed the approach ourselves (1)
- We developed our approach based on an established program (please identify which program you adopted) (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (please specify) (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Unsure (4)

Q2.3 Who has been trained in restorative practices at your school? Check all that apply.

- No one (1)
- Principal (5)
- Assistant Principal(s) (6)
- Some teachers (7)
- All teachers (8)
- Some staff (i.e., counselors, special services, etc.) (2)
- All of the school staff (3)
- Some support staff (i.e., cafeteria staff, custodial staff, administrative assistants) (9)
- Other (please specify) (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q2.4 What is the average amount of restorative practices training staff receive each year?

- Less than a day (1)
- One day (2)
- Multiple days (3)
- Multiple days with ongoing support (4)
- Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q2.5 For what reasons are restorative practices used at your school? Check all that apply.

- General preventive discussions (11)
- Student verbal conflict (1)
- Student/staff verbal conflict (2)
- Student/staff physical conflict (3)
- Minor behavior infractions (non-physical) (4)
- Major infractions (physical) (5)
- Property infractions (vandalism) (6)
- Bullying (7)
- Truancy (8)
- Alcohol/Substance use (9)
- Other (please specify) (10) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.1 Who can initiate the restorative practices program in the school?

- Students (1)
- Adults (2)
- Both (3)

Q3.2 How long have you had a restorative practices program at your school or district?

- It is a new program this year (1)
- 1–3 years (2)
- 4–6 years (3)
- More than 6 years (4)
- Unsure (5)

Q3.3 Who has been trained to implement the restorative practices program at your school?

Check all that apply.

- No one (1)
- Principal (5)
- Assistant Principal(s) (6)
- Some teachers (7)
- All teachers (8)
- Some staff (i.e., counselors, special services, etc.) (2)
- All of the school staff (3)
- Some support staff (i.e., cafeteria staff, custodial staff, administrative assistants) (9)
- Local law enforcement (12)
- Outside consultants (11)
- Other (please specify) (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.4 What is the average amount of restorative practices training staff receive each year?

- Less than a day (1)
- One day (2)
- Multiple days (3)
- Multiple days with ongoing support (4)
- Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.5 Is the restorative practices program you are implementing something you and your staff developed or did you adopt an established program?

- We developed the program ourselves (1)
- We adopted an established program (please identify which program you adopted) (2)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other (please specify) (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.6 For what reasons are restorative practices used at your school? Check all that apply.

- General preventive discussions (11)
- Student verbal conflict (1)
- Student/staff verbal conflict (2)
- Student/staff physical conflict (3)
- Minor behavior infractions (non-physical) (4)
- Major infractions (physical) (5)
- Property infractions (vandalism) (6)
- Bullying (7)
- Truancy (8)
- Alcohol/Substance use (9)
- Other (please specify) (10) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.7 What happens to a youth who has already been through the restorative practices program and continues to misbehave at school?

- He/She is given another chance using a restorative practices approach. (1)
- He/She is given a traditional school sanction. (2)
- Other (please specify) (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.8 Is there a limit to the number of times a youth can go through a restorative practices program?

- Yes (please specify) (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q3.9 Approximately how many youth complete a restorative practice program each month at your school? (If you run a program in multiple schools, please choose one school you know of to answer this question).

- The program is too new to answer (1)
- 1–5 youth (2)
- 6–10 youth (3)
- More than 10 youth (4)
- Unsure (5)

Q4.1 Does your school provide staff time for group reflection about restorative practices?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Answer If Yes Is Selected

Q4.2 How often does reflection take place?

- Never (1)
- Once per quarter (2)
- Once a month (3)
- Every other week (4)
- Weekly (5)
- Daily (6)
- Unsure (7)
- Other (please specify): (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4.3 Do you consider your program a success?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Too early to tell (3)

Q4.4 To what extent has implementation of restorative practices in your school(s) been successful with the following:

	Not at all (1)	Very little extent (2)	Some extent (3)	Great extent (4)	Very great extent (5)	Unsure (6)
Reduction in suspensions (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase in academic achievement (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase in student respect for other students (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase in student respect for staff (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase in staff respect for each other (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase in staff respect for students (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improvement in overall school climate (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) (8)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q4.5 What are some barriers to successfully implementing the restorative practices in your school? Check all that apply.

- Training needs (1)
- Lack of administrative support (2)
- Lack of parent support (3)
- Insufficient funding (4)
- Lack of buy-in by staff (5)
- Resistant students (6)
- Other (please specify) (7)

Q4.6 Please use the space below to comment on anything about your program that was not included in the survey.

Q4.7 Are there other people you recommend we send this survey to that are also working on restorative practices in schools? If yes, please provide their information below. Please note that the survey distribution is limited and recommendations may not be solicited for a response.

	Name (1)	School/Program (2)	Email (3)
Reference 1 (1)			
Reference 2 (2)			
Reference 3 (3)			
Reference 4 (4)			

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. What population does your LEA serve (demographic break down)?
2. How long have you had an RJ program at your school/district?
3. Please describe your current role related to RJ in schools. (What do you do? Train people? Consult? Run circles? Do mediation?) How did you get into this work? (Optional Q.)
  - What are the roles and responsibilities of the educators involved with respect to RJ in the school? District?
  - Who else is involved and how?
4. To what extent is RJ supported within your community? Where else/who else uses it? (courts, other schools, families?)
5. What is the relationship between RJ and other behavioral management programs in the schools (e.g., PBIS, anti-bullying programs, etc.)?
6. What types of incidents/cases does the RJ program handle? How many chances does a youth get to go through RJ?
7. Approximately how many youth are handled by RJ each year (or week/month)?
8. How do you define RJ? What does it look like in your school/setting? (This may have come out earlier.)
  - What components do you consider to be an essential part of a [true] RJ model?
  - What other models are you aware of/familiar with? How do they differ from a [true] RJ model?
  - Can you describe a typical RJ opportunity or event that takes place in your school/district?
9. What do you consider your biggest successes with the RJ program to date?
10. What are the challenges to implementing, operating, and sustaining RJ in the school/district? Are there any negatives to RJ?
  - Is there anyone who objects to RJ (teacher, administrator, student, parent)?
11. What types/in what ways are you collecting data?
12. To what extent are youth in the school aware of/understand RJ? (e.g., is it in the student code or disciplinary code?) What information is provided to the students and staff about RJ?
13. What is your plan for RJ in the upcoming school year? What about the next five years?
14. Would you be interested in being added to the list to receive our final report on RJ in schools?
15. What else would you like to share about Restorative Justice in schools that I did not ask you?