

A Way Back: Educator Perceptions of Restorative Practices and Its Effect on the  
Learning Environment

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the last decade, restorative practices have emerged as an alternate form of school discipline as a result of the negative effects of exclusionary discipline practices. Restorative practices seeks to limit exclusionary practices and keep more students in the classroom while focusing on student accountability and relationship building. The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the perceptions of school staff on the implementation of restorative practices and their effect on the learning environment in order to answer the following research questions: (1) How do teachers and administrators perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do teachers and administrators perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

An urban Tennessee middle school that had been implementing restorative practices school-wide for four years, was chosen as the case for this study. Four school staff members were chosen utilizing purposeful sampling techniques to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. To provide context to interview data, the researcher also collected and examined four consecutive years of student achievement data, student discipline data, and student attendance data. Interview data was analyzed using first and second cycle coding methods. This study found mixed results for the utilization of restorative practices. All participants perceive restorative practices as having a positive effect on school culture and believed their use resulted in fewer

behavior incidents. Positive effects reported included a focus on building relationships, more caring classroom communities, and conflict mediation strategies that helps to teach students how to successfully deal with conflict. However, participants still expressed reservations that the amount of time dedicated to the RP could take away from instructional time. Participants also reported serious concerns about how students who do not seem to respond positively to restorative strategies affect the learning environment.

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## LIST OF OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS/ABBREVIATIONS

*The following operational definitions were used throughout this study and appear in alphabetical order.*

**Average Daily Attendance:** The percentage of students who are present daily at a specific school. This is often a statistic used by state reporting agencies to determine school funding.

**Chronically Absent Students:** This refers to any students who are absent more than 10% of days in a given year.

**Circles-** A circle is a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems. Circles give people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum and equality. The circle process allows people to tell their stories and offer their own perspectives (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010).

**Exclusionary Discipline-** Describes any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting. These consequences can include in-school suspensions (ISS), out-of-school suspensions (OSS), zero tolerance offenses, and expulsions. Typically used to punish undesired behaviors, deter similar behavior by other students, and promote more appropriate behavior (Steinburg and Lacoce, 2017).

**Office discipline referrals:** This term refers to the action of a teacher or other school staff member sending a student to an administrator or principal as a consequence for

inappropriate action. This often requires the staff member to write or submit a written explanation of the incident which is then listed on the student's discipline report. The school administrator or principal then addresses the student behavior. referral that is written for a student regarding misbehavior in class. These are also referred to as behavior referrals, discipline referrals, or referrals (Fox & Hemmeter, 2014).

**Restorative Practices:** Restorative practices are an alternative approach to school discipline that evolved out of the idea of restorative justice (Hulvershorn and Mulholland, 2018). This approach includes a variety of different strategies or practices that aim to create an environment where individuals can take responsibility, learn from and support each other through building of community (Morrison et al., 2005). While restorative practices reflects many of the key components of RJ, restorative practices are different than restorative justice in that they are more preventive in nature and are utilized primarily to deal with student behavior as opposed to crime and deviant behavior which is where RJ has its foundations (Kline, 2016; Kehoe et. al., 2018).

**Restorative Justice:** While there is no standard definition of restorative justice, Zehr (2002) defined RJ as a process to involve those who have a stake in a specific offense, and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible. Zehr (2015) later expanded the definition, stating that RJ encompasses a variety of programs and practices, but at its core is a set of values and principles that provide an alternate framework for looking at wrongdoing. While many researchers use the terms Restorative Justice, Restorative Practices, and Restorative Justice in Education interchangeably, for purposes of this study, restorative justice refers

to overall original concept of used in criminal justice situations, used primarily with adults to address harm caused to communities and individuals.

**School climate:** School climate is the feeling, the tone, the mood of the school. Climate is variable and can change in a relatively short time. Climate is a subset or building block of school culture

**School culture:** School culture is the personality of the school, the way people do business, and the semipermanent condition at the school. It can be defined through by the observable patterns, behavioral norms, and deeply held values displayed every day in classrooms, corridors, and administrative offices. School culture is built on the shared values, norms, and beliefs of members of the school community, and it shapes the social environment of the school. It is the summation of multiple climate conditions and can be changed through long-term and sustained strategies and efforts (Eller & Eller, 2017; Hemmings, 2012).

**Satisfactory Attendance:** This is the percentage of students at a specific school who have been present for at least 95% of all school days.

**Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** Social and emotional learning (SEL) as an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. Social emotional learning programs can also

effectively enhance a student's connection to school (CASEL, 2020; Hultershorn & Mulholland, 2018).

**School-To-Prison Pipeline:** The “school-to-prison pipeline” is a national trend of school policies pushing students out of schools and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems (ACLU, 2018; Flannery, 2015; Lind and Nelson, 2015).

**Urban schools:** Hemmings (2012) described urban schools as those that typically serve low-income students of color and are plagued with problems, embody cumbersome bureaucracies, suffer from chronic underfunding, experience high teacher turnover, are rife with incendiary inter-group hostilities, and are subject to top-down federal reforms and state initiatives.

**Zero Tolerance Policy:** Exclusionary discipline responses that are pre-determined and have an automatic punitive consequence attached. Long term suspensions and expulsions are examples of zero tolerance policies. These are often in response to student misbehavior pertaining to drug possession or use, gun possession or use, and some physical aggressions (Skiba and Peterson, 1999).

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This qualitative instrumental case study will examine teacher and administrator perceptions of the implementation of restorative practices in schools and its effect on the learning environment. In the field of public education, the need to create an environment more conducive for teaching and learning is critical for sustained academic success. Disruptions to the educational environment can affect both students and teachers, leading to a loss of instructional time and escalating discipline issues. This chapter will introduce restorative practices and examine why it is being promoted as a solution to current perceived issues with student discipline. The chapter will begin by examining current issues with student discipline and their effect on school culture and climate. Next, the chapter will review the background of zero-tolerance policies and how they have led to the “school to prison pipeline.” Finally, the chapter will introduce this study and highlight what the researcher aims to accomplish.

Lezotte & Snyder (2011), two researchers who have spent years studying the characteristics of highly effective schools, claim that “In a chaotic environment, principals can’t lead, teachers can’t teach, and students can’t learn”(p. 101). This quote reinforces the importance the researchers place on schools creating a safe and orderly learning environment. One key component in the creation of a safe and orderly learning environment is the ability to effectively handle school discipline issues (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Despite the importance placed on handling student discipline effectively by researchers, this remains a struggle in a large number of school districts across the United States. Discipline issues and classroom disruptions affect all students and lead to

the loss of instructional time. In the field of public education, the need to create a school environment more conducive for teaching and learning is vital. For years experts have debated the best ways of managing student behaviors while creating a positive and caring environment; however, many schools have come to primarily rely on punitive discipline approaches to deal with student discipline issues (Payne & Welch, 2015).

In a report created by the former Secretary of U. S. Department of Education, Arne Duncan, entitled *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* (2014), Duncan warned school districts of the dangers of relying too heavily on punitive approaches to discipline. In this report, Duncan (U. S. Department of Education; 2014) highlighted issues with school discipline, arguing that widespread overuse of suspensions and expulsions have had tremendous negative costs for schools and students. He points out several issues with these practices, claiming that students who are suspended or expelled from school are often left unsupervised during daytime hours and are denied the ability to benefit from great teaching, positive peer interactions, and adult mentorship offered in class and in school. Duncan (U. S. Department of Education; 2014) also contends that suspensions do nothing to help students develop the skills and strategies they need to improve their behavior, avoid future problems, and that suspended students are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to be suspended again, repeat a grade, drop out of school, and become involved in the juvenile justice system. Duncan similarly addresses issues with zero-tolerance policies, stating that when exclusionary practices are carried out in connection with zero-tolerance policies, schools can erode trust between students and school staff, and undermine efforts to create the positive school climates needed to engage students in a

well-rounded and rigorous curriculum. Zero tolerance policies refer to discipline responses that can be pre-determined and have an automatic punitive consequence attached. Duncan (U. S. Department of Education; 2014) ends his report by calling on America's educators to proactively redesign discipline policies and practices to more effectively foster supportive and safe school climates.

Despite this plea from Duncan, in many schools, discipline is still linked primarily with punishment. In fact, the Civil Rights Data Collection Division of the U. S. Department of Education (2021) found that in 2018, more than 1.5 million students were suspended, another 2.5 million students received at least 1 day of in-school suspension, and over 100 thousand students were expelled from school in the United States. These discipline infractions resulted in over 11 million missed school days. In direct opposition to these numbers, many researchers and scholars are attempting to point out that these punitive approaches are ineffective at decreasing future negative behavior, teaching students successful communication and relations, ensuring students and staff are safe, or creating a climate conducive to student achievement (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

### **Background of the Topic**

According to Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018), In the 1980s concerns about school violence led to an increase in the implementation of zero tolerance policies and other exclusionary practices. School leaders hoped these responses would be harsh enough to prevent future misbehavior and create safer school communities. However, despite the optimism around these policies, Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) found in their analysis of current research, that these policies are ineffective at decreasing behavior offenses. The research of Kennedy-Lewis (2014) and Markowitz (2015) backs up this

claim, finding that the use of these exclusionary practices continued to rise despite evidence demonstrating their ineffectiveness. Kennedy-Lewis (2014) also points out that these policies can institutionalize exclusionary discipline as the preferred response to student non-compliance and disregard the role of the organization in shaping student behavior, leading to the belief that these students have forfeited their right to an education. This can become even more detrimental for the students involved when school discipline becomes intertwined with the criminal justice system.

With the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the use of severe zero tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline continued to rise and also led to an increased involvement of police officers in schools (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014; Markowitz, 2015). Lind and Nelson (2015) support this idea in their research, as they highlight how school discipline and the criminal justice system have become more intertwined over the last 25 years. A fact that can often lead to the criminalization of minor infractions of school rules (Lind & Nelson, 2015; ACLU, 2018). One example of this is the increased use of the School Resource Officer, or SRO (Lind & Nelson, 2015). SROs are police officers who are permanently housed inside school buildings. This was designed to increase school safety, but often leads to students being criminalized for behavior that should be handled by school personnel. For many older students, trouble at school can lead to their first contact with the criminal justice system, and in many cases it is the schools themselves that are pushing students into the juvenile justice system; often by having students arrested at school by School Resource Officers (Lind and Nelson, 2015). This is what is often referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline” or a national trend of school policies pushing students out of schools and

toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems (ACLU, 2018; Flannery, 2015; Lind and Nelson, 2015).

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, (ACLU; 2018) this trend is much worse for minority students and students with disabilities. They claim that many of these children that are pushed into the criminal justice system have learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect, and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services. Instead, they are isolated, punished, and pushed out (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014). A study by Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine (2009) in Missouri found similar results. Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009) analyzed education and justice system data from 53 Missouri counties and found evidence that the decisions being made around discipline in schools had a meaningful impact on patterns of racial disproportion in the juvenile justice system. More specifically, the counties that targeted Black students for exclusionary discipline also experienced higher rates of referrals to juvenile court for Black youth.

According to Manassah, Roderick, & Gregory, (2018) racial inequity is a pernicious problem in American schools. Among its many manifestations are discrepancies in school discipline. Kline (2016) agrees stating that "Disparities in school discipline data is a national concern" (p. 97). Studies have shown that black students are two to three times more likely than their peers to be suspended and expelled, even for similar infractions and new evidence suggests that this pattern directly contributes to the racial achievement gap, school dropouts, and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system (Kline, 2016; Manassah, et al., 2018). The fact that these practices affected minority students at a much higher rate lead to what Kennedy-Lewis (2013)

refers to as the “discipline gap” between students of color and their white counterparts and appear to continue to exasperate the school to prison pipeline.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Lind and Nelson (2015), research has shown that students who were assigned frequent suspensions and expulsions had a much greater chance of serving time in prison. Kline (2016) emphasizes this point and shows that when these practices are used in excess, they can have even worse outcomes for students stating that "research shows that exclusion from school is closely linked with academic failure, dropout, and involvement in the juvenile justice system. When suspensions are given in excess, students continuously miss out on opportunities to learn and fall behind in their academics. When the student returns to school, feelings of frustration may lead to reoccurring behaviors, ultimately resulting in an incessant cycle of exclusionary discipline" (p. 98). The ACLU (2018) who is committed to ending the “school to prison pipeline,” believes that since school stakeholders have now identified the negative impacts of frequent suspensions and expulsions, it is vital that schools begin using alternative approaches to addressing student behavior. In response, schools over the last decade have begun a shift away from assertive style discipline programs and towards a more trauma informed, social and emotional learning approach (Manassah et al., 2018).

Research is beginning to show, that as schools begin to utilize more supportive approaches to school discipline, their school climate and culture becomes more positive. According to a study conducted by Brackett (2018), when 6,000 U.S. educators were given a survey on school culture, the respondents said they spend nearly 70 percent of their days at school feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, and stressed. Their research also

indicated that much of that stress was related to the climate and culture in the schools. Research by Smith et al. (2018) found that the ideal school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. It also allows the adults to develop meaningful and engaging practices, activities, and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice. Research from Gerlinger and Wo (2016) had similar results, finding that schools are more effective that prioritize a school environment based on order, fairness, and positive teacher-student relationships. Gerlinger and Wo (2016) also found that rather than rely on additional security measures to deter school victimization and disorder, schools with more structure and support were associated with less student victimization and bullying, particularly when structure and support were taken together.

According to Manassah et al. (2018), the issues above with current discipline practices, combined with the promise of newer alternative approaches have led to the call from national education leaders for a change. The researchers highlight this trend in their research, stating that "In 2014, federal and state agencies recommended that schools reduce reliance on suspensions in favor of alternative practices. School and district leaders are increasingly seeking such alternative tools and strategies, but these resources are not yet widely available or used." (Manassah, 2018, p. 36). One new alternative discipline strategy that has gained popularity in the past decade is restorative practices (RP). According to Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018), restorative practices are rooted in restorative justice and support the development of positive relationships in schools. RP also aims to engage, rather than exclude, students who misbehave in schools

(Mayworm, Sharkey, Hunnicutt, & Schiedel, 2016). Given its potential as a positive discipline technique, RP approaches have gained attention in the public and research spheres as an alternative to more traditional and punitive styles of discipline.

Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018), claim “There are several compelling reasons that schools should consider restorative practices. These elements include giving schools that are seeking to limit out of school suspension/expulsion tangible and meaningful tools; giving schools the ability to address disproportionality of discipline on students of color; and evidence that such practices can improve teacher morale and retention” (p . 112). Wachtel (2016), the founder of the International Institute of Restorative Practices and an advocate of restorative practices, determined that restorative justice practices that have been implemented with fidelity not only aid in effective classroom management but also reduce the amount of suspensions and expulsions from schools. According to Wachtel (2016), many issues stem from archaic discipline practices including: negative student perceptions of safety and justice, low academic performance, and low perceived self-worth. Students should feel safe at school and recognize fair treatment through equitable practices. For these reasons, Kline (2016) highlights RP as an approach that has the potential to greatly reduce disparities in discipline data in the United States.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In a report completed by the Tennessee Department of Education & Tennessee Education Research Alliance (2019), teachers’ perceptions of how student discipline is handled is predictive of whether or not they like the way things are run at their school. This report also shows a link between the teachers’ perceptions that school leaders handle discipline issues in an ineffective manner and a loss of instructional time. This loss of

instructional time is strongest in urban districts where 53 percent of teachers in urban districts who do not think leadership effectively handles discipline report losing more than 18 days of instructional time; with more than 28% of those teachers claiming that they lose more than 45 days of instructional time to disciplinary disruptions. This report highlights the importance that school discipline practices have on the instructional environment. This is even more true in urban environments where student behavior can lead to a drastic loss of instructional time. With the impact that student behavior can have on the learning environment, the effect of alternative discipline practices on learning needs to be examined more closely. With these issues in mind, this study plans to answer the following research question: (1) How do teachers and administrators perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do teachers and administrators perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

This study will give insight into the experiences of the teachers and students as well as describe how different students and teachers experience restorative practices as an approach to discipline within the context of a specific school environment. This chapter highlighted perceived issues with current discipline practices, provided background information on zero tolerance school discipline policies and presented research on how minority students are regularly pushed out of schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This chapter also discussed the importance of a supportive school culture and introduced restorative practices as an alternative approach to traditional discipline practices. Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive literature review of

restorative practices; describing the basic tenets of RP and analyze its overall effectiveness as an alternative to more traditional discipline approaches. The literature review will also review the challenges involved in the whole-school implementation of restorative practices and closely examine its effect on school culture. With this study, the researcher aims to contribute useful research in the support of school leaders and educators who are looking for ways to improve discipline practices, improve academic achievement, and produce more equitable outcomes by answering the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools where restorative practices are emphasized?

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of restorative justice, discuss how it is used in a school setting, and investigate restorative practices as an alternative to more traditional discipline approaches. The literature review will begin with a brief overview of different discipline practices, examining their impact on educational outcomes and the learning environment. Next, the basic tenants of restorative justice and how it is used in an educational setting will be outlined. The literature review will then highlight the benefits and possible concerns of restorative practices in relation to academic achievement, student discipline, and school culture.

Challenges involved in the whole-school implementation of restorative practices, specifically in regard to on-going professional development and its impact on teachers' perceptions of the student discipline and school culture, will be reviewed as well. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research and a justification for the study.

### **Evolution of Student Discipline Practices**

Inappropriate student behavior in school is not a new issue. According to Allman and Slate (2011) teachers have reported student behavior as a classroom issue since the early beginnings of the public-school system. In order to examine this issue more closely, Allman and Slate (2011) conducted a literature review of current school discipline practices in the United States. In this review, the researchers examined ways in which disciplinary actions have evolved over time. They found that historically, schools have relied on punitive consequences to combat student misbehavior. The consequences most commonly used include verbal reprimands, corporal punishment, after-school detention, in-school suspensions (ISS), and out-of-school suspension (OSS).

Stuart (2010) claims that while student behavior has always been an issue, the need for discipline systems evolved out of the educational movement of the early 1800s. This movement encouraged the development of legal requirements for all school age children in the United States to attend regular school. Before these requirements, schools felt no need to systemize discipline procedures. They could simply dismiss students indefinitely if they were determined to be a regular behavior problem. The researcher goes on to claim that these new legal requirements forced school administrators and teachers to begin to look for new ways to change student behavior. Stuart (2010)

concluded that this eventually led to a court decision known as the State v. Pendergrass in 1837. This decision centered on a school mistress who was found not guilty of assault after hitting a female student with a switch. A switch is a small flexible branch, cut from a small tree and used for corporal punishment. According to Stuart (2010), this decision resulted in a new common law doctrine known as *in loco parentis*. *In loco parentis* states that the school has the legal responsibility to act as a parent in the parent's absence.

The researcher also claims this court decision legalized corporal-punishment as a legitimate discipline tool for schools. Imbrogno (2000), defines corporal punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort. This researcher claims that after its legalization, corporal punishment became widely popular in US schools. This would continue until the late 1990s when the United Nations convened the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which published several provisions either explicitly or implicitly prohibiting its use. Afterwards, corporal punishment was outlawed in a majority of countries of the world, and although it would become less popular in the US, it still remains legal in 19 states. According to Imbrogno (2000) the United States remains one of the only countries who have not outlawed its use. The researcher concludes by stating that while there remains a large number of critics of the practice that call for a national ban, the empirical research on corporal punishment's effects on children remains inconclusive.

### **Exclusionary Discipline Practices**

Steinburg and Lacoé (2017) consider exclusionary discipline as any consequence that excludes a student from their regular school environment. These consequences can include in-school suspensions (ISS), out-of-school suspensions (OSS), zero tolerance

offenses, and expulsions. According to Allman and Slate (2011) school administrators began to use out-of-school suspension (OSS) as a method of reducing student misbehavior in the 1960s. The researchers explain that OSS requires students to be removed from the school for a designated amount of time after a discipline incident. The researchers argue that schools envisioned that the suspension of the misbehaving student would help create an atmosphere more conducive to learning by providing incentive for the behavior to not occur again, while also protecting school personnel and other students at the same time. The researchers also argue that although OSS was originally intended as a way to punish students and to alert parents of serious student misbehavior, over time it began being utilized for less serious incidents and eventually became one of the most commonly used consequences for student misbehavior.

This overuse has led to several concerns from critics of the practice. One major concern according to Allman and Slate (2011) is that many times students who are suspended from school are students whose academic achievement is already low, and upon returning to school after a suspension, many students have missed so much learning that they cannot catch up. The researchers (Allman and Slate, 2011) also highlight a second concern that suspending students can intentionally reinforce the undesired behavior. They argue that the consequence can cause the student to have more negative feelings toward the teacher or the class, and the student then can choose to repeat the unwanted behavior if they decide they no longer want to be in that environment. Steinburg and Lacoé (2017), point out a third issue with OSS, stating that advocates for discipline reform contend that suspensions are meted out in a biased way. The

researchers highlight statistics from US schools that show minority students and students with disabilities are suspended at a much higher rate than their peers.

To combat some of the issues with out of school suspensions, schools began to adopt in school suspension programs. Allman and Slate (2011) state that these programs can vary from school to school, but primarily include the placement of the student in a separate classroom away from their peers and regular educational environment where they are isolated and expected to complete classroom assignments with little academic assistance. The researchers state that four variations of in-school suspension programs have evolved over the 50 years to include punitive, academic, therapeutic, and individual in-school-suspension programs. These programs vary in the amount and type of support the students receive during the placement. However, the researchers point out that punitive model is the most widely used in the United States. Steinburg and Lacoé (2017) argue that most of the issues that apply to OSS, also apply to ISS. They claim that minorities and students with disabilities are still disciplined at a much higher rate than their peers. They also point out that there is no evidence that these consequences help to alter student behavior.

Another form of exclusionary discipline is zero tolerance offenses. Zero tolerance offenses refer to discipline responses that are pre-determined and have an automatic punitive consequence attached. Long term suspensions and expulsions can both be a result of a zero-tolerance offense. Skiba and Peterson (1999) identified the origin of the term “zero tolerance” and explained that it was used in education policy during the drug enforcement acts of the 1980s. The researchers define “zero-tolerance” as the exclusionary practices of education institutions in response to student misbehavior

pertaining to drug possession or use, gun possession or use, and some physical aggressions. Hulvershorn, K. and Mulholland, S. (2018), claim that in the 1980s concerns about school violence led to an increase in the use of zero tolerance policies. Cuellar & Markowitz (2015) agree with this claim and highlight the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 as the main conduit for the increased use of severe zero tolerance policies. The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 is a law that requires every school district receiving federal education funds to enforce a one-year mandatory expulsion for students who possess a firearm on school grounds. The researchers claim that this law forced all districts to enact one-year mandatory expulsions for gun possessions, but also opened the door to the use of extreme consequences for less serious infractions as well.

According to Allman and Slate (2011) the purpose of these severe consequences was to disincentivize school violence while also removing the offending students in an effort to maintain a safe school environment. However, many advocates of discipline reform contend that exclusionary discipline and zero-tolerance policies are ineffective at changing behavior and can actually have adverse consequences for school climate. Steinburg and Lacoé (2017) reference a study completed by the American Psychological Association's Zero Tolerance Task Force, which found that there is no clear evidence that exclusionary policies reduce school violence. The research of Allman and Slate (2011) supports this point, finding that despite the use of harsher zero-tolerance punishments, disciplinary actions reported by schools for physical aggression, insubordination, and the possession of firearms did not change over a 10 year period. Steinburg and Lacoé (2017) also discuss the effect exclusionary discipline can have on school culture stating that "while zero-tolerance policies aim to improve school climate and safety by removing

disruptive students, research evidence finds that teachers and students in schools with high suspension rates report feeling less safe than their counterparts in schools serving similar students that have lower suspension rates. Schools with higher suspension rates also have greater teacher attrition and turnover” (p. 49). The researchers do warn, that while the evidence does suggest that school climate is worse when exclusionary discipline practices are more widespread, current researchers have yet to prove that the evidence is causal.

While the evidence is not clear on how exclusionary discipline affects school climate, critics believe the effects are clearer for the individual students who experience them. According to Steinburg and Lacoé (2017), a 2014 survey from the American Association of School Administrators found that 92 percent of superintendents believe that out-of-school suspensions are associated with negative student outcomes, including lost instructional time and increased disengagement, absenteeism, truancy, and dropout rates. Cuellar & Markowitz (2015) also address the concerns critics have for these policies stating that the U.S. Department of Education, the American Bar Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychological Association are all in opposition of zero tolerance policies. The researchers believe that these policies have led to more aggressive tactics such as increased metal detectors, surveillance cameras and to the criminalization of school offenses. The researchers believe these policies are ineffective and can trigger a downward spiral in students’ lives inside and outside of school, leading to the school-to-prison pipeline. These statistics are even worse for minority students who are disciplined at much higher rates than their white peers (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014). Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) agree and propose that

such policies do not work because the root cause of the misbehavior is not addressed. For these reasons, Kehoe et al. (2018) claim that over the last decade, schools have begun to shift away from assertive style discipline programs and towards a more trauma informed, social and emotional learning approach. The use of restorative practices as a discipline strategy has also grown out of this movement.

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative practices are an alternative approach to school discipline that evolved out of the idea of restorative justice. According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, or IIRP (2020) restorative justice has its roots in ancient and indigenous practices employed in a variety of cultures all over the world, where offenders were given a path back into the society by making restitution for their wrongs. However, the IIRP (2020) traces the modern roots of restorative justice to a mediation or reconciliation between victims and offenders in Ontario, Canada in the 1974 where a probation officer arranged for two teenagers to meet directly with their victims following a vandalism spree. At this meeting, the teenagers agreed to a restitution plan. Afterwards, the positive response by the victims led to the first victim-offender reconciliation program of its kind. This idea of reconciliation is at the heart of restorative justice according to Kline (2016), who states that restorative justice advocates see crime as something done to both people and communities.

Kline (2016) goes on to claim that the primary goal of restorative justice (RJ) is to help restore the harm done and give a voice to its victims. According to Zehr (1997) this is a total shift from most current legal systems with their focus on rules and laws, which often make victims feel like a secondary concern. Zehr (1997) considers restorative

justice to have a harm focus and a central concern for victims' needs. This means that instead of focusing on punishment, the focus is placed on the harm committed and the restitution needed. Mirsky (2011) has a slightly broader definition of restorative justice, describing it as an overall philosophy that helps a perpetrator take responsibility for their behavior, repairing harm in a supportive environment focused on teaching rather than punishment. Kline (2016) agrees, stating that the foundation of this approach to discipline is the idea that the perpetrator understands the negative impact of their actions on the individual and community which results in a decreased likelihood that the perpetrator would repeat the same offense.

Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne (2005) contend that RJ first started appearing in schools in Australia in the 1990s in the form of restorative conferencing, which is a structured meeting between a victim and offender. Morrison et al. (2005) go on to claim that since that time, restorative conferencing began to be utilized in schools in several other countries with studies conducted in England, Canada, and the United States all showing its effectiveness in dealing with inappropriate behavior of a serious nature. Morrison et al. (2005) also point out that as RJ became more popular it grew to include additional strategies, or what they call a “continuum of practices” (p. 338). These practices are what Kline (2016) describes as “an umbrella of tools that educators can use to establish positive relationships with all students and stakeholders” (p. 97). Such tools include restorative circles, affective questions, and affective statements; all of which will be discussed in greater detail later in this literature review. As this trend began to grow Kehoe et al. (2018) contend that the use of the term ‘justice’ was removed when being used in the school setting. Kehoe (2018) goes on to state this is because it was no longer

considered reflective of how the approach was used in that environment, and that restorative justice was eventually replaced by the term “restorative practices.”

### **Restorative Practices**

Kline (2016) believes that restorative practices are different than restorative justice in that they are more preventive in nature and are utilized primarily in schools with young people. According to Kehoe et. al. (2018) “The restorative practices approach reflects many of the key components of RJ; however, the RP approach is used to deal with student behavior as opposed to crime and deviant behavior which is where RJ has its foundations” (p. 191). The IIRP (2020) has a much different view of the terms restorative practices and restorative justice. They (IIRP, 2020) view restorative justice as a subset of restorative practices; describing restorative practices as a social science that studies how to achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making. The IIRP’s (2020) definition of restorative practices also includes the use of informal and formal processes that precede wrongdoing and that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and misconduct. The research of Song and Swearer (2016) sums up this conflict over terms by claiming that within educational RJ literature there is no set common terminology at this time. Instead, they (Song & Swearer, 2016) claim that authors use a wide variety of terms for RJ, including RJ in education (RJE), restorative practices (RP), restorative discipline, and restorative approaches. Despite the terminology that is used or the challenges to label and define RJ in a concise way, when these approaches are used in the school context, the principles of RJ are consistent. Vaandering (2014) summarized the key principles found in school-based RJ literature in the following way:

- Restorative justice addresses harm done, not rules broken;
- Restorative justice promotes healthy, caring communication and fosters nurturing relationships; and
- Restorative justice facilitates dialogue for those affected by harm, those responsible for causing harm, and their supporting community members in order to expose and then address the needs of all. (p. 66)

While these principles lay the foundation for restorative practices, Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel (2009) maintain that the disciplinarian's response to misbehavior is what makes an approach restorative or not. In particular, the researchers argue that a restorative approach needs to be based on social discipline, combining accountability with support. While some may view a restorative approach as lacking in its "toughness" it is important to note that both support and accountability is paramount to RJ. It is the combination of support and accountability that differentiates RJ from other discipline models (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Costello et al. (2009) claim that traditional discipline models look at misbehavior to determine what type of punishment is needed to ensure that this behavior is not repeated and assume that failure to punish will lead to more of the unwanted behavior. Costello et al. (2009) uses the Punitive – Permissive Continuum shown below in figure 1 to illustrate how they believe society looks at possible responses to wrongdoing.



Figure 2



The diagram illustrates that restorative responses contain both a high amount of support and a high amount of control. Costello et al. (2009) argue that this is a true example of a restorative response to misbehavior. A response that can create an environment where the student is held accountable for their actions and nurtured at the same time. They (Costello et al., 2009) equate this strategy to actively engaging students and doing things with the students, instead of doing this to, or for students. Morrison et al. (2005) agrees with this idea of differences between the approaches stating that "The RP approach is in direct contrast to a punitive approach, which primarily focuses on the wrongdoer and how they defend themselves to minimize or avoid punishment" (p. 191). Table 1 below illustrates the differences between the approaches.

Table 1

<b>Different Approaches</b>	
<b>Traditional/Punitive Discipline</b>	<b>Restorative Discipline</b>
Crime and wrongdoing are violations against rules/laws.	Crime and wrongdoing are violations of people, relationships, and community.
Justice requires that blame is assigned and punishment is imposed.	Justice involves victims, wrongdoers, and community members in an effort to put things right.
Focus is on wrongdoers getting what they deserve.	Focus is on victim needs and wrongdoers responsibility to repair harm.

Costello et al. (2009) point out that when students are punished, they often see themselves as the victim. The misbehaving students then dwell on their own feelings and fail to reflect on how their behavior has affected others. They (Costello et al., 2009) believe that if the wrong that is done is not addressed, or the hurt relationships are not restored, the incident can often repeat itself. It is clear, to effectively implement restorative practices an organization must focus on the wrong doer's responsibility to repair harm committed. However, for this to happen the offender must first feel as if they are a part of the community.

### *Relationships*

Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) emphasize the importance of community building in their research stating that "Community building provides a foundation to help support discipline procedures" (p. 112). Lezotte & Snyder (2011) also emphasize this idea stating that "Building a sense of community within the school fosters the student's need to belong" (p. 104). Kehoe et. al. (2018) argue that schools that utilize these approaches believe that when a wrongdoing has occurred it results in damaged relationships and these relationships need to be repaired by engaging the parties in conversation" (p. 191). The ideas of community members and relationships among "community members" in a school is analogous to a car engine in that when one part of a car engine malfunctions it affects how the other parts of the engine function. Helping students understand how they are a part of whole and can impact the community in positive or negative ways provides a context for restorative practices.

The researchers also emphasize the importance of relationships and the community setting, describing restorative practices as an overarching philosophy and

actions that regard relationships and learning from harm as paramount in any community setting. Schools that utilize restorative practices often focus on building relationships and empathy, emphasize taking responsibility for one's own actions, and attempt to engage the entire school community in solving discipline issues. These schools treat behavior incidents as an offense to the entire school community and will often allow victims to confront the offender to discuss what harm their actions caused.

McCluskey et al. (2008) believes the restorative approach helps young people become aware of how their actions affect other people and gives them the opportunity to take personal responsibility for those actions. The IIRP (2020) also place a strong importance on the idea of accountability and community stating that in education circles and groups provide opportunities for students to build relationships, solve problems, play an active role in addressing wrongdoing and making things right. Smith, Frey, & Fisher (2018) agree stating that "A notable feature of restorative practices is the effort devoted to repairing relationships when a wrong has been committed. The entire community is involved, since damage to an individual is seen as harmful to the entire group. Rather than facing banishment, the offender has a path forward to make amends, to reestablish his or her trustworthiness with the victim and the community" (p. 76). It is this attitude that Kline (2016) points to as one of the primary reasons that reformers tout restorative practices as a better alternative than traditional discipline approaches. He goes on to state that "reformers hypothesize that the use of restorative practices, as an alternative to exclusionary practices, will support a reduction in the number of referrals and suspensions issued in schools in order to reduce, and ultimately eliminate the disparities in discipline data across the nation" (Kline, 2016, p. 97).

Morrison et al. (2005) further emphasizes this point stating that the primary aim of restorative practices is to create an environment where individuals can take responsibility, learn from and support each other through building of community. The IIRP (2020) goes further stating that the aim of restorative practices is to develop community and manage conflict by repairing harm and building relationships. The IIRP (2020) believes this process must include both proactive approaches, discussed above like building relationships and developing community, and reactive approaches like repairing harm and restoring relationships. They (IIRP, 2020) claim that organizations that only focus on reactive approaches without building the social capital beforehand are normally less successful.

The IIRP (2020) also believe that restorative practices should not be limited to formal processes, such as restorative conferences or family group conferences, but should range from informal to formal. The IIRP (2020) demonstrates this concept with what they call the “restorative practices continuum” shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 3



The “restorative practices continuum” names several common restorative strategies and labels the amount of formality the IIRP (2020) believes is needed when they are utilized in a school setting. According the IIRP (2020) informal practices include affective statements that communicate people’s feelings, as well as affective questions that help people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others. As the practices move to the

right on the continuum they become slightly more structured and require additional prep time, with the formal conference being the most elaborate and requiring the most preparation time.

### *Affective Statements*

Kehoe et al. (2018) discusses affective language as another strategy utilized under the restorative practices umbrella. As seen above, the IIRP (2020) rates affective statements as the most informal type of response on the continuum. According to Kehoe et al. (2018) affective language involves using statements about how a person was impacted by another person's behavior. The aim of this approach is to elicit feelings from the other person and encourage them to reflect on how their behavior can affect other people. Costello et al. (2009) describes affective language as one of the easiest and most useful tools for teachers when building a restorative classroom. Their use can help foster an immediate change in the dynamic between teacher and student and drastically diminish the need for more serious responses in both frequency and intensity. Affective statements are a form of "I" statements. In Table 2 below Costello et al. (2009) show examples of typical responses vs. affective responses.

Table 2

<b>Typical vs. Affective Statements</b>	
<b><u>Typical</u></b>	<b><u>Affective</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop Teasing Sandy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It makes me uncomfortable when I hear you teasing Sandy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking during class is inappropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am frustrated that you aren't listening to me</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You shouldn't do that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel sad when you say something like that to John</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't want to see you fighting him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I get angry when you say something like that to John</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit down and be quiet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I get angry when you talk and joke during my lectures</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't want to see you fighting with him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was shocked to see you hurt Pete</li> </ul>

Costello et al. (2009) have found that many students are completely unaware of the impact they have on others. However, their research has shown that the use of affective statements can improve relationships within the classroom while also showing students that when they fail to meet an expectation, it was more than a rule that was violated. Affective statements show student that their misbehavior has also violated their relationship with the teacher and classmates. Research has shown that communicating about a feeling on an affective level can motivate the wrongdoer to make things right with the student they offended. (Costello et al, 2009; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013).

#### *Affective Questions*

Costello et al. (2009) believe that accepting that conflict is an integral part of life is essential to adopting restorative practices. Affective questions allow teachers and school administrators to deal with that conflict in a restorative way. According to Thorsborne & Blood (2013) affective questions are more involved than affective statements in that the wrongdoer is asked questions about who was affected and how they were affected to prompt the wrongdoer to consider the feelings of others. It is meant to be non-threatening and non-blaming, so the conversations should be driven by the principles of connectedness and caring and building on the strengths of the student to solve the issue. Seen below in chart 2, the IIRP (2020) give examples of affective questions asked of both the wrong doer and those affected in a hypothetical situation.

<b>Affective Questions</b>	
<b><u>Offender</u></b>	<b><u>Victim</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What happened?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What did you think when you realized what happened?”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What were you thinking about at the time?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What impact has the incident had on you and others?”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What have you thought about since?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What has been the hardest thing for you?”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Who has been affected by what you have done?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What do you think needs to happen to make things right?”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What do you think you need to do to make things right?”</li> </ul>	

Costello et al. (2009) claim that these types of questions help students to see the difference between punishment and accountability while teaching them to express themselves and find solutions to their problems. Costello et al. (2009) admit that these strategies take more time than other traditional discipline responses, but believe they are worth the time commitment.

#### *Small Impromptu Conference*

Costello et al. (2009) describe short impromptu conferences as an opportunity to utilize restorative questions and solve a problem quickly, without the need for including additional people in a more formal restorative conference. Smith, et al. (2018) have a slightly broader idea of the impromptu conference stating that “an impromptu conference is a short, private discussion with a student who is having difficulty. Impromptu conferences aren’t an excuse for lecturing the student in the hallway; the intention is to pose questions that give student and teacher a glimpse into what’s really going on. This tactic requires a conceptual shift from asking oneself, “What’s wrong with that kid?” to “What happened to that kid?” In many cases, the difficulty has nothing to do with what’s going on in the classroom, but rather with something happening in the student’s life (like

the death of a pet or a conflict with a friend)” (p. 77). Costello et al. (2009) goes on to point out another benefit of this strategy, stating that it can allow an educator to resolve an issue in a restorative manner, avoiding the need for more punitive action.

### *Circles*

According to Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel (2010) the circle is a potent symbol that has evolved in almost every culture as a means for community meetings and discussions. The circle allows everyone in the group the same status, which Costello et al. (2010) describe as leveling the playing field for everyone. Manassah, et al. (2018) believe this is critically important and can be a powerful strategy for addressing the developmental needs of adolescents because they offer deep opportunities for cultivating a sense of belonging and for self-expression" (p. 37). Costello et al. (2009) also emphasize the flexibility of circles, stating that they can be used for a variety of purposes and can be either proactive or reactive. Reactive circles are often in response to wrongdoing. This normally occurs when the entire class is involved, or the number of students involved are too large to handle with an impromptu conference. A circle is more formal than the other responses previously discussed and can take more preparation time. However, Costello et al. (2009) point out that these types of circles are much more effective when the school has already established proactive circles as a normal part of the classroom routine. Costello et al. (2010) point to the benefits of reactive restorative circles, stating that students generally feel happier and behave in a more positive manner when those in authority “did things with them rather than to them or for them” (p. 8).

Costello et al. (2009) list a variety of ways that teachers can use proactive circles in their classrooms. These can include check in and check out circles, a circle to facilitate

discussion on classroom norms, set academic goals for the class, or the teacher can even utilize the circle to dive deeper with academic content. These types of circles require some teacher prep time, but Hulvershorn and Mulholland, (2018) believe proactive circles can also be filled with content from the participants themselves, stating that “rather than teach a lesson on how to handle stress or anger, a circle allows the teacher to turn it over to students to discuss ways that they have experienced successful management of stress and/or anger. These strategies that come from within the community are often more likely to be heard and acknowledged by the student" (p. 115).

#### *Formal Conferences*

According to Kehoe et al. (2018) formal conferences are a reactive approach that involves formally bringing together the students in a conference, after an incident has occurred, to discuss what happened and how to resolve the issue. The IIRP (2020) gives a more descriptive response stating that a restorative conference is a structured meeting between offenders, victims and both parties’ family and friends, in which they deal with the consequences of the crime or wrongdoing and decide how best to repair the harm. According to the IIRP (2020) conferences provide victims and others with an opportunity to confront the offender, express their feelings, ask questions, and have a say in the outcome. Costello et al. (2009) states that when this occurs in the school setting, a school staff member other than the teacher is usually in charge. This staff member will often meet with the students and other participants beforehand, which requires a considerable amount of preparation and planning time on behalf of the school.

Costello et al. (2009) notes that the conference itself is often very formal. The facilitator often follows a specific script that of open-ended questions that allows the

participants to guide the meeting and limits the influence of the facilitator. The IIRP (2020) states that at the conclusion of a successful conference, there is often a resolution that the participants agree too. This resolution is often an attempt to solve a problem or restore a relationship. Short et. al. (2018), believes that this is a crucial step stating that "Providing an opportunity for students to restore relationships with others is an important lesson for successful integration into society" (p. 319). Short et. al (2018) also points out the need for the language used during a restorative meeting to be non-confrontational and non-blaming. Short et. al (2018) emphasizes that the language used during a restorative meeting or conversation is crucial to achieving the end goal of resolving difficulties and restoring relationships. McCluskey et al. (2008) agrees with the importance of language, adding that it is also vital that each person has an equal opportunity to express their own perspectives and listen to each other in a safe and equal environment.

### **Social Emotional Learning and Restorative Practices**

Kehoe et al. (2018) argue that the implementation of restorative practices can have positive effects for students, but also point out the need to explicitly teach students a range of "life skills" they will need in the future. This range of skills includes how to work together, behave responsibly, show respect to others, and deal with adversity when it arises. They (2018) argue that actively teaching students these skills not only reduces student behavior problems, but also reduces rates of anxiety and depression as well. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) argues the best way to teach these types of skills are through school-based SEL programs. CASEL (2020) believes that social and emotional learning is an integral part of education and human development; defining it as the process through which all young people and adults

acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. According to CASEL, successful SEL is not a standalone program or an add-on. It is central to how schools, communities, and families value and support the social, emotional, and academic development of their children.

The research of Beyer (2017) connected the benefits of SEL to underserved populations noting that SEL plays a critical role in preparing young people for success in college, careers, and life. Beyer (2017) argues that high quality SEL programs have been shown “to reduce behavioral problems, improve students’ sense of belonging, increase school attendance, and promote academic achievement” (p. 1). Lezotte & Snyder’s (2011) research supports this position finding that “Schools must transform themselves into learning communities in which educators create need-satisfying environments” (p.104). Dweck’s (2006) research points out that developing certain emotional skills can also help students academically. She argues that students with a growth mindset can become better at overcoming obstacles and learning new and difficult material.

In their research, Hultshorn & Mulholland (2018) examined the connection of SEL programs and restorative practices, finding “that when RP are implemented with SEL programming, it is an opportunity for educational practitioners to address issues around race, gender, disability, and other aspects of diversity. By integrating these approaches together, RP become a vehicle to develop students’ SEL skills, which includes communication skills, kindness, empathy, and caring” (p. 111). Hultshorn & Mulholland (2018) go on to claim that social emotional learning programming supports

the goals of RP by providing an approach to helping children recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively” to enhance a student’s connection to school. Manassah et al. (2018) agrees claiming that the two must go together in order for students to feel comfortable sharing complex and personal information.

Brackett (2016) discusses the importance of emotions in his research finding that "Ignoring how you feel and trying to just “push through” emotions can impair a person’s ability to learn and process knowledge; make good life decisions; develop healthy relationships; feel confident, secure, and happy; and perform at their best. Fortunately, we now know that not only are emotions relevant to intelligence, but that the more we repress them, the more they can affect our cognition and distort our perceptions" (p. 15). Brackett also states that "Emotion management skills pertain to how we reason with and about emotions—and how we use that information to guide decisions and strategically take actions that lead to the best outcome for ourselves and others" (p. 16). Brackett (2016) argues that schools need to help children to understand the wisdom of emotions, and that by doing so, we are able to develop young people who are kind, caring, resilient, and academically successful. Brackett (2016) also points out that these skills are even more important for students facing adverse child experiences or ACEs, because “the psychological and biological stress responses that accompany trauma impact motivation and executive functioning” (p. 18).

Manassah et al. (2018) also researched the connection between restorative practices and SEL, describing the relationship as building a house, pointing out that SEL

skills help lay the foundation that allows meaningful relationships to develop. Manassah et al. (2018) believes that one of the reasons for this connection is that restorative practices offers schools a powerful opportunity to practice these SEL skills, helping to build the sense of community that is needed for the successful implementation of restorative practices. Hulvershorn, K. and Mulholland, S. (2018) seem to agree, stating that "SEL programs promote positive behaviors such as caring, empathy, and kindness to improve relationships between students, and between students and teachers. Thus, understanding the connection(s) between RP and the goals of SEL programming makes sense" (p. 114). Manassah et al. (2018) goes on to mention the importance of this combined approach claiming that "Restorative practices and SEL each show promise in addressing the enormous challenges related to school discipline and academic underperformance in high-needs schools. However, neither approach by itself has been shown to reliably overcome these challenges or close the wide discipline gap between black students and their peers" (p. 37).

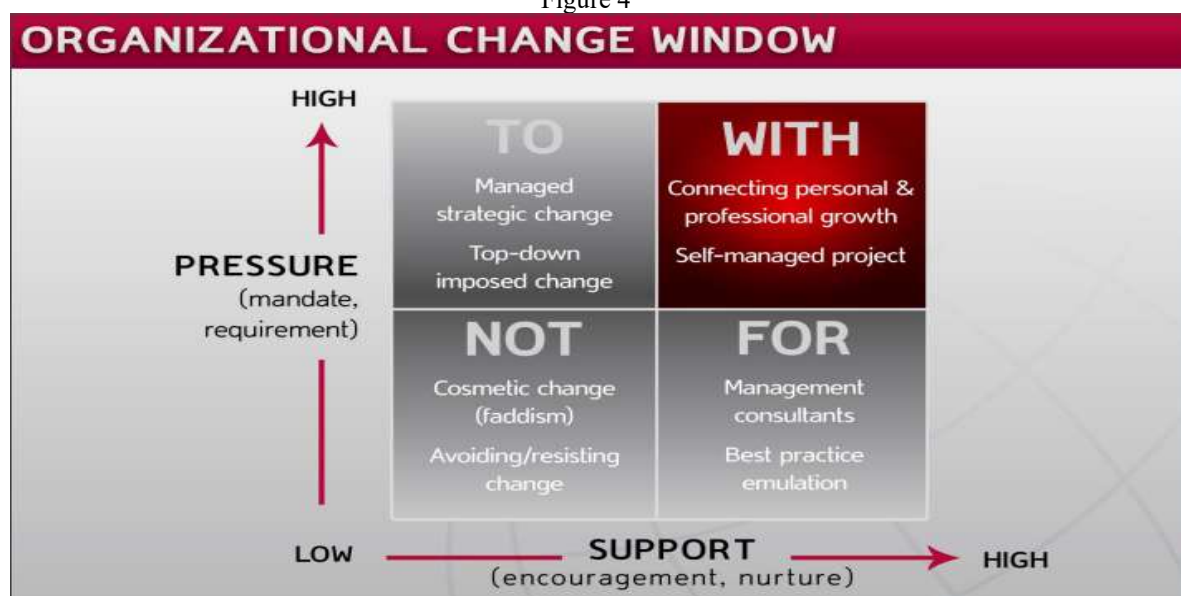
As discussed earlier in this review, minority students are disciplined at a much higher rates than their peers. Traditionally, this means that these students are excluded from academic opportunities through OSS or ISS which can lead to devastating effects for these students (Steinburg and Lacoé, 2017; Allman and Slate, 2011). These researchers also show that more traditional punitive discipline practices often occur in schools with negative cultures. Manassah et al. (2018) highlights new evidence that suggests that this pattern directly contributes to the racial achievement gap, increases in school dropout rates, and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system. These are all issues that advocates hope to address through newer less exclusionary discipline policies, like RP

and SEL integration. However, lasting change is only possible if capacity is built at the school level (Manassah et al., 2018).

### Implementing Restorative Practices in Schools

Costello et al. (2009) argue that for restorative practices to be implemented correctly, a school must first recognize a need for change, articulate a vision for the future, and then set a detailed course for the implementation for that change. Costello et al. (2009) do not believe that there is a one size fits all implementation model for restorative practices, but instead each school needs to develop their own model based on the unique needs of their school. However, Costello et al. (2009) offer a matrix meant to guide school leaders with their implementation of restorative practices. This matrix, seen below in Figure 4, is called the “Organizational Change Window” and is modeled after their Social Discipline Window.

Figure 4



This window shows pressure from school administrators as one axis, with high pressure at the top and low pressure at the bottom. The second axis shows the level of support or

encouragement, with low on the left and high on the right. Costello et al. (2009) use this to illustrate the need for school administrators to both enforce expectations of staff to follow mandates, while also providing high amounts of nurturing and support. This illustration provides staff members with incentive to change behavior, while also providing them with the how and why. These ideas fit with other researchers' ideas of how to encourage organizational change. Wexler (2019) confirms this philosophy, concluding in her research that "far too often teachers are told to do things without having the underlying reasons explained" (p. 76), which she believes limits the ability for school administrators to change the beliefs or actions of staff members. Wexler (2019) goes on to state that this is especially true for teachers with change fatigue who believe they have already experienced "too much" or "way too much" change in the preceding years. The authors of *Switch* (Heath, C. & Heath, D., 2015), also agree with this philosophy emphasizing the need for clarity when change is occurring. Claiming that "what looks like defiance, is often lack of clarity" (p. 15).

### *Staff Resistance*

Kehoe et al. (2018) contends that although there can be significant positive impacts on student outcomes and behavior, the adoption of a whole-school approach to RP has its challenges. One of the greatest challenges identified is creating cultural change across the school environment. This is especially true in a school where there is resistance from staff to move away from a traditional punitive approach to discipline. Research from McCluskey et al. (2008) provides more clarity to this idea. They found that many staff in schools where RP has only recently been implemented talked about difficulties reconciling their current behavior management or discipline practices with

RP. McCluskey et al. (2008) contend that although these staff were interested to see how RP could support their day-to-day work with students, they were often unsure about its use in more serious situations and that the majority of staff and students surveyed early in the implementation process indicated that punishment was sometimes necessary. The researchers concluded that for restorative practices to be effective there must be a significant time commitment for training and modeling with staff and students.

Research from Cameron & Thorsborne (2001), also emphasized the importance of professional development for staff. They claimed that the key challenge to a successful implementation of restorative practices is achieving consistency throughout the school. McCluskey et al. (2008) highlighted this need through quotes from participants saying that: ‘in order for restorative practice to have a full impact on the school and atmosphere it needs to be something that absolutely everyone is doing’ (Emily); ‘I think it is just something that we need to keep reminding staff to do and to try and work at’ (Linda).” (p. 321). McCluskey et al. (2008) determined that training for staff needs to be ongoing, and for RP to be successful there must be mindset shift amongst the staff. The researchers also state that “The key features associated with successful implementation, in both primary and secondary schools, included readiness for change, and also balance of clarity and flexibility about identification of aims” (p. 412). Shaw (2007) backs up this claim finding that while restorative practices may have a positive impact on school culture, in order for school communities to sustain RP the focus needs to move from one of behavior management to one of relationship management. Manassah et al. (2018) also emphasizes these conclusions, through their research stating that an effort to transform school culture and structures must tackle both the big-issue conversations and the daily

practicalities of running a school and educating students. The connection and time devoted to SEL practices in addition to restorative justice practices needs to be intentional and be built into the school day.

### **Current Research on Restorative Practices**

According to Mayworm, Sharkey, Hunnicutt, & Schiedel (2016) studies evaluating the effectiveness of restorative justice programs within the adult criminal justice system have been generally supportive of the approach. However, despite its potential as a positive discipline technique, empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in schools has been scarce (Servick, Garnet, Moore, Ballysingh, & Smith, 2020). This is especially true for schools in the United States. In their research, Mayworm et al. (2016) conducted an exhaustive literature review of peer reviewed scholarly articles of studies looking at restorative justice programs conducted inside of schools. In this review, the researchers found only 19 studies related to RP implementation, and only seven of those were conducted inside the United States. Mayworm et al. (2016) reported that none of the studies used an experimental design; only one had any sort of control group; and the majority were case studies or pretest–posttest designs.

Of these studies, the researchers claim the most methodologically rigorous study, implemented a quasi-experimental design with a no treatment control group. This study conducted in Hong Kong by Wong, Cheng, Ngan, and Ma (2011) surveyed 1,480 seventh- to ninth-grade students at 4 different schools prior to implementation and 2 years after implementation on measures of bullying behavior, empathy, self-esteem, sense of belonging, and other school-climate factors. Researchers found that, despite

similar rates of bullying at pretest in all four schools, the intervention and partial intervention schools had significant decreases in bullying behavior from pre- to posttest, whereas the control group had a significant increase in bullying. In addition, students also reported increases in empathy and self-esteem that were not found in the control groups. Mayworm et al. (2016) claim that findings from this study provide support for the use of an RJ program within schools, but design limitations limit conclusions about its effectiveness. Mayworm et al. (2016) also report that while the other studies primarily used nonexperimental pretest–posttest designs, these studies in general have found decreases in behavioral referrals, suspensions, repeat offending behaviors, and disciplinary actions. Cultural difference from the Wong study also could make generalization of the results to schools in the US difficult.

Another important study on restorative practices evaluated a pilot project pertaining to the implementation of restorative practices in three separate school districts in Scotland (McCluskey et al., 2008). The researchers in this study were asked to monitor the implementation of restorative practices, which was new to Scotland, in 10 secondary schools, seven primary schools and one special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and report on the effectiveness of the program. This study was very large in scope, utilized a range of data collection methods, allowed for unique opportunities to engage directly with many staff and pupils, and resulted in an immensely rich set of data. The findings of this study were very positive overall. The researchers highlighted strong evidence of real and sustained engagement, with substantial gains being made in many of the schools. This resulted in the study being extended for two additional years.

In their report, the researchers (McCluskey et al., 2008) found that key features associated with successful implementation, in both primary and secondary schools, included readiness for change, and a balance of clarity and flexibility about identification of aims. This was very often associated with good quality training and leadership. McClusky et al. (2008) also suggested that RP had the most impact when school staff were willing to reflect on their daily interactions in school and review their values, and that "RP seemed most effective when 'behaviour' was seen as an issue to be addressed through restorative strategies that involved active learning for all children and for staff across the school" (p. 415). The researcher's conclusions were that in many schools there was a clear positive impact on relationships, seen in the views and actions of staff and pupils and in a reduction of playground incidents, discipline referrals, exclusion and need for external support.

Short et al. (2018), completed a long-term study evaluating the views of staff members who were actively involved with restorative practices in a school setting and had similar results. The researchers found that using a restorative approach was seen by participants to have improved the atmosphere and climate within the school. They also found that over time students developed the skills they needed to solve problems themselves by learning to resolve conflicts without violence. The researchers go on to state that "RP was also seen as having wider benefits in terms of behaviour and academic attainment and, importantly, in creating an educational environment that was perceived emotionally and physically 'safe'" (p. 322). Kehoe et al. (2018) also confirms these findings, stating that "to date, school communities adopting RP have identified many positive impacts on the school environment. These include reductions in bullying

incidents, greater collegiality amongst staff, and more caring, positive attitudes among staff and students overall. Servick et al. (2020) also report that several school districts in the US that have implemented RP in their districts have reported findings of improved school climate and decreases in serious behavior incidents. However, they also warn that these findings can be subjective, and it is not clear how much context matters in the use of RP or how it's long-term effects on academic achievement. More studies are needed in a variety of settings, especially in US schools.

### **Future Research**

According to Kevick et al. (2020) a large portion of the most current and published research on restorative practices are studies out of the United Kingdom. He makes this point to show the need for additional scientific studies within the US. Kevick et al. (2020) also points out that the majority of the research on RP implementation in the U.S. have primarily been situated in middle and secondary school settings even though RP implementation occurs across the K–12 spectrum in some schools or districts. The researchers believe this should be a critical area of need for future research, pointing out that challenging behavior in young children often leads to poor postsecondary outcomes and that behavioral challenges among children ages 6–8 has been longitudinally associated with a lower probability of obtaining a high school degree.

Mayworm (2016) is also critical of the lack of studies in whether RP helps to solve the problem of disproportionate discipline practices. Mayworm (2016) highlights that in their research none of the studies analyzed measured the effect of RP on racial disproportionality. The researchers hypothesize that this may in part be due to the international context of most of the studies but suggests that further research on the effect

of RJ on discipline disproportionality is necessary. Kevick et al. (2016) agrees stating that it is critical to know whether RJ helps solve the problem of disproportionate discipline practices.

Mayworm (2016) also believes that more research is needed on the effectiveness of teacher training programs that focus on discipline and RJ. The researchers also suggest that more research be conducted to determine how well teachers can implement RJ strategies after school- or district-wide PD, what components of PD are successful, and whether additional supports are warranted. They also suggest further research understand teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in RJ in order to better determine how to best meet their training needs. McCluskey et al. (2008) similarly point out the need for additional studies stating that there are still gaps that must be considered to address nuances in behavior management within educational institutions. Kline (2016) agrees with this direction and points to the need for future research to explore teachers' classroom management skills as well as their perceptions of acceptable classroom behavior. Research in this area could shed more light on how well RP works with students who have more intense behavior issues and how their presence in classrooms affects the overall school climate.

### **Literature Review Summary and Study Justification**

This chapter discussed the evolution of discipline practices in US schools and detailed how traditional discipline approaches evolved over time. The Researcher argues that these approaches have become overused, are ineffective at changing student behavior, and have led to mostly negative student outcomes. This is especially true for minority students who are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline practices.

The researcher introduced restorative practices as an alternative discipline strategy to the traditional punitive exclusionary approaches. Components of RP were defined, and school-wide implementation strategies were reviewed including their limitations. The Researcher subsequently reviewed evidence of the effectiveness of RP and argued that RP and SEL are compatible approaches that can be implemented together to transform school culture and support a school's ability to develop students' emotional intelligence. Next, the Researcher reviewed current research on RP finding that while RP has shown positive results as an alternate approach to school discipline, the research literature on the outcomes of implementation is still emerging, particularly within the U.S. (Song & Swearer, 2016). Lastly, the researcher argued that there remains a need for additional research, especially in the following areas pertaining to RP: younger students, effective implementation strategies, professional development for teachers, and the effect on academic achievement, particularly in US schools. These findings have influenced the researcher's methodological approach and have led to a focus on the following research questions for this study: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices? Chapter Three will provide further details on the research design, site selection, and data analysis methods for this study.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative instrumental case study explored the implementation of restorative practices and its effect on the learning environment in a middle school setting. Merriam

indicated (1998) that case study is flexible because it includes any and all methods of data collection for the researcher to acquire rich information from the case. Specifically, an instrumental case study allows researchers to gain an insider's view of an issue or concern (Stake 2005). Furthermore, an instrumental case study also seeks to understand the how and why of a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995). The researcher chose an instrumental case study for this topic in order to provide an in-depth view of the effect of restorative practices on a school's learning environment in a variety of settings with the goal of finding what works in context.

In this study, the researcher examined the experiences of educators implementing restorative practices at a middle school that was in its 5<sup>th</sup> year of the utilizing restorative practices school-wide to answer the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

These questions sought to explore the perspectives of educators and examine their views of the effects of restorative practices on their students and the learning environment. This chapter explains why a qualitative research design is the best choice for this study and explains the research design and methodological approach. It also describes the participant selection, research site, methods for data collection and analysis, and methods to ensure the credibility of the study.

## **Rationale for the Study**

Hatch (2003) describes traditional research as taking place in a controlled setting and only allows the researcher to define how an individual will act in a narrowly defined or artificial setting whereas qualitative research attempts to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it. Merriam (1998) goes further stating that the qualitative researcher assumes that the world is highly subjective and is in need of interpretation and measuring. While the researcher of this study sought to understand the subjective experiences of the participants' involvement with restorative practices, their primary purpose was to interpret the experiences of participants and evaluate how these practices have affected the learning environment in different educational settings. In order to get to the core of these experiences, and to maximize the depth of understanding of the research questions, a qualitative research design was chosen for this study.

Within this qualitative design, the researcher is operating from a pragmatic theoretical framework in the approach. Creswell (2013) refers to pragmatism as not being committed to any one system of philosophy and reality, thus, giving individual researchers the freedom of choice in methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes. Creswell (2013) goes on to describe the individual using this worldview as someone who will focus on the practical implications of the research and will highlight the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem. Patton (1990) agrees, stating that with pragmatism, there is a concern with applications - "what works" - and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). The researcher's primary aim in this study is to interpret the experiences of the participants with RP, while analyzing RP's larger effect on the learning environment. Utilizing four

different educators allowed the researcher to examine the role RP plays in different contexts, allowing the researcher to have a broader concept of what works in different educational settings.

### **Methodological Approach**

According to Bhattacharya (2017), case studies are often used in qualitative research to answer focused questions with in-depth inquiries in order to inform policies or uncover contributing reasons for perceived cause and effect relationships. While stating that case study does not imply any specific paradigm, Yin (2003) describes case study as an empirical inquiry that examines a phenomenon within its real-life context. Merriam (1998) agrees, stating that a case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education and has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations and for evaluating programs and informing policy. When describing types of case studies, Bhattacharya (2017) explains that a researcher can utilize a single case or multiple cases to explore an issue. While Bhattacharya (2017) goes on to explain that utilizing multiple cases can allow the researcher to provide analytical insights on things that are similar and different between the cases, Stake (2005) suggests that an instrumental study can allow the researcher to investigate how a group of individuals experience a specific phenomenon or subject. This idea led the researcher to choose an instrumental case study design for this study. The researcher also considered utilizing a phenomenological framework for this study. However, the use of a phenomenological framework would only allow the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants, which would limit the researcher's ability to measure the school-wide effect of RP. An instrumental case study, on the other hand, allowed

the researcher to scrutinize all aspects of the school environment, including attendance rates, achievement scores, and artifacts related to the implementation process. This, in turn, incorporates both aspects and will provide a larger picture of how RP has affected the participants and the learning environment. The purpose was to allow the researcher to explore differences in how restorative practices are implemented in different classrooms within the same building, while utilizing the school-wide data to provide context to the experiences of the participants. According to Yin (2003) case study research is commonly used to study school innovations, particularly when looking at common design experiences across school sites. With restorative practices still being a relatively new approach in the field of education, the researcher believes that an instrumental case study is the correct methodological approach for examining restorative practices.

Merriam (2009) acknowledges case study research can use both quantitative and qualitative methods; however, when working on qualitative case studies, cases should be selected based on the research purpose, and for what they could reveal about the phenomenon or topic of interest. Merriam (1998) goes on to state that the single most defining characteristic of a case study lies in defining the object of the study, or the case. In addition, Merriam (2009) explains that the aim is to provide a rich holistic description that illuminates one's understanding of the phenomena. In this study, the phenomenon that is being studied is restorative practices and its effect on the learning environment. This phenomenon will be studied inside its natural setting, with the school itself being its own bound case. Creswell (2007) describes case study as “the exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple

sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). The case, or school, for this study was selected based on pre-determined criteria and in conjunction with the school district’s research department. The researcher then interviewed all participants and analyzed 5 years of school data, starting before the implementation of RP. This study falls in line with the research of Miriam (1998) who contends that while there needs to be a scope or boundary of the study, the researcher has freedom in what they might conceptualize as a case. Creswell (2007) refers to this as the context of the case.

Creswell (2007) goes on to suggest that the focus of the case study can be the case itself, or an issue that the case is able to illustrate. The hope for this study is that by selecting the school itself as the case, it will allow the researcher a broader picture of how RP truly affects learning and the students who experience it, which will provide the researcher the ability to make more wide-ranging generalizations about the use of RP in schools.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

Yin (2003) believes that the researcher should remain neutral and independent from the experience, and great efforts should be taken in order to harness and avoid bias. To accomplish this, it is important to present the researcher’s background and the role he will play in this study in a clear manner. The researcher is currently an assistant principal in a suburban elementary school in the district where this study will take place. During his 13 years working in this district, he has accumulated extensive firsthand knowledge dealing with school discipline and in the implementation of both restorative practices and social emotional learning. His first administrative position in this district was as a dean

of students at an urban middle school. This school was located in an impoverished part of the city and had a reputation for having a large number of discipline incidents. During his time there, his primary position was to deal with student discipline. In this position, the researcher saw the promise of restorative practices, and worked with district leaders to develop and implement a school-wide restorative practices initiative. This initiative was a success, cutting out of school suspension by over 70% and all discipline incidents by 50% after two full years of implementation. School scores on staff and student climate surveys also rose dramatically. This experience demonstrated to the researcher how beneficial restorative practices can be to the climate and culture of a school building.

However, while this past success is the reason for the researcher's interest in this topic, the researcher still has questions about the impact of restorative practices in other academic areas and in other academic settings. While RP showed success in improving climate and culture in the researcher's previous school, academic scores remained stagnant. The process also raised questions about how the implementation process would affect the outcome and if this program could be successful in different settings with student from different backgrounds. Through this study, the researcher hopes to gain a clearer picture of the experiences of staff and the effect of restorative practices on the overall learning environment in different settings.

### **Research Site and Case Selection**

This qualitative instrumental case study will explore the implementation of restorative practices (RP) in an urban middle school in the Middle Tennessee area. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used for the

district, the school, and all participants. The Clay County School District (CCSD) was selected for this study for two primary reasons. The first reason this district was chosen is due to its historical struggles with school discipline. With over 50,000 students, CCSD is one of the largest school Districts in the state. Being a district of this size, in a largely urban area, it has had serious issues with school safety and overall culture throughout the years. This has led to a negative reputation in the community and to a large number of parents choosing to send their children to private schools instead of their local public school. This happens in larger numbers at the middle school level. These families tend to be white and are of a higher socio-economic status than that of the average CCSD student. CCSD also has high suspension rates, especially for African American males, which has led the district to explore the use of alternative discipline strategies. Over the last decade, CCSD has created district offices for social emotional learning, restorative practices, and trauma informed teaching. While there was no district-wide mandate for schools to implement these strategies, the district required schools with high suspension rates to consult with one of the offices to evaluate their practices. Schools are currently at different levels of the implementation process in this regard.

The second reason CCSD was chosen for this study is due to the diversity within the district. The school district covers a very large area, which includes inner city, rural, and more affluent neighborhoods. The city also has a large immigrant population, representing a variety of countries and over 100 different languages. The school chosen for this study is in a more affluent neighborhood, but buses in students

from the inner city. It's zone also encompasses areas with high Hispanic and Arabic populations. This allows the researcher to evaluate the implementation of alternative discipline strategies in different settings with a variety of different cultures.

The site location for this study was be chosen in conjunction with the CCSD office of Restorative Practices and Research Department. This process was guided by what Patton (2015) refers to as intensity sampling, where the cases manifest the phenomenon intensely over time, but are not extreme success or failures. For this study, the researcher wanted a middle school that had been implementing RP for at least 3 years without either extreme failure or success and had a building principal who had been with school before the RP implementation process. The Restorative Practices department provided several possible locations of middle schools who met the criteria above. Buckhorn Middle School (BMS) was eventually chosen due its location and student diversity.

After the site selection, the researcher conducted a short interview with Dr. Wooten, the school principal. During this first interview the researcher explained the process and used purposeful sampling techniques to select additional information-rich participants. According to Marshall (1996), "Qualitative researchers recognize that some informants are 'richer' than others and that these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding to the researcher" (p.523). Patton (2002) also attest to the "logic and power of purposeful sampling... Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling" (p.230). Dr. Wooten helped to

choose these participants based on criteria provided during the first interview. These teachers were identified as Ms. Noble, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, and Ms. Bryant, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher. Ms. Noble has been teaching for eighteen years. She began teaching at BMS for 4 years ago, which was the first year of RP implementation. Prior to that she taught in a more rural district which employed more traditional discipline strategies. Ms. Bryant has been teaching for 14 years and has spent her entire career at BMS. Dr. Wooten, the school principal, Mr. Amis, the school RP specialist, were also chosen as participants. These participants were chosen for their knowledge of school-wide RP procedures to provide additional context for the study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Yin (2004) states that case study research should rest upon multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. In addition, Yin (2004) suggests that case study researchers should make use of a combination of these six evidentiary sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artifacts, each of which has its own strengths and weaknesses. This study sought to interpret how different educators experience restorative practices as an approach to discipline within the context of a specific school environment. To accomplish this, the researcher primarily utilized interviews and unobtrusive data collections which included archival records. The researcher began the data collection process by examining archival records over a 4-year period. Beginning the year before the implementation of RP and ending in year 4 of implementation. These records

included the following: enrollment numbers, demographic data, attendance rates, academic achievement results, and discipline records.

After the data analysis process, the researcher began collecting data through interviews with teachers, the restorative practices specialist, and the executive principal. All interviews were semi-structured, planned events that took place virtually. After first acquiring consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed for the explicit purpose of gathering information in the clearest possible manner. Based on the recommendations of Hatch (2004) the researcher used guiding questions but followed the leads of the participants, asking follow-up and clarifying questions that were generated in the interview context. Hatch (2004) considers formal interviews an opportunity to get the participant talking about the phenomena under investigation, so the initial questions were based on the data analysis of the historical records and an exhaustive literature review of the topic. The researcher attempted to minimize their role and develop questions that encouraged the participant to talk in depth about restorative practices. The initial questions were the same for each participant and were reviewed by members of the participating dissertation committee to maintain the objectivity of the researcher and consistency between interviews. The researcher also created a menu of follow up questions to be used depending on how the participant responded to the initial questions. A practice interview was completed with a fellow doctoral student and a CCSD employee to better vet the initial questions and anticipate the need for follow-up questions.

The researcher conducted 5 total interviews. These interviews were all conducted via an online platform after school hours. The first interview was with the

executive principal and only lasted 10 minutes. The purpose of this interview was to clarify the purpose of the project and choose additional participants. After this meeting, all participants were emailed with information about the study. The following BMS staff members were identified and agreed to participate: Ms. Wooten, the school principal, Mr. Amis, the school RP specialist, Ms. Noble, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, and Ms. Bryant, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher. Each participant was interviewed once via Zoom, with each interview lasting between twenty-five and thirty-five minutes.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

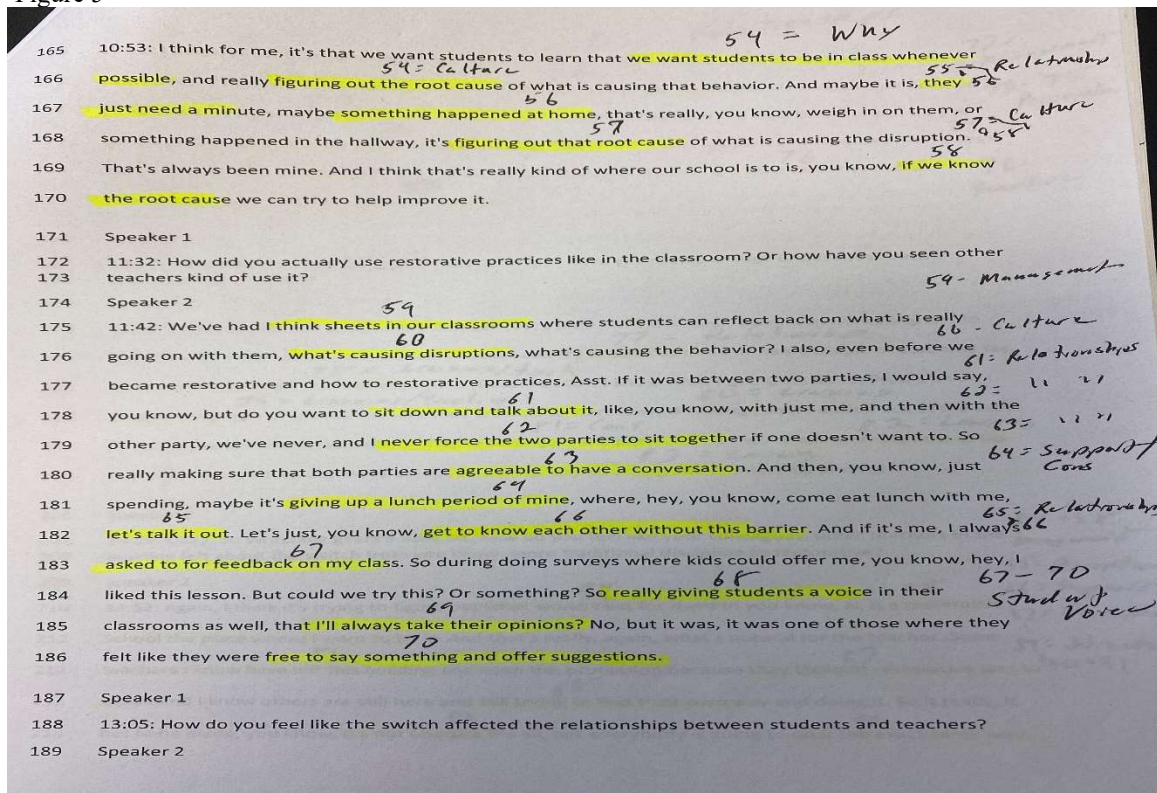
Hatch (2002) states that “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (p. 148). Hatch (2002) goes on to suggest that the researcher should be organizing and interrogating the data in ways that allows the researcher to discover themes, patterns, relationships, explanations, make interpretations, or generate theories. According to Hatch, (2002) when interviews are used with unobtrusive data collection, interviews can reveal the meanings and significance of artifacts collected in the field. Since this study is an instrumental case study, data analysis took part in two steps according to the recommendations of Creswell, (2007) who stated that when multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is to provide within case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across cases, called a cross-case analysis.

Eisner (1998) suggests that data analysis is an ongoing and inductive process: “It is simply not possible to predict the flow of events as they unfold, so researchers must adjust their course of action based on emerging conditions that could not have been anticipated” (p. 170). With this in mind, the researcher began data analysis from an

inductive viewpoint; utilizing what Saldana (2021) refers to as “pragmatic eclecticism” . Which means starting to review the data with an open mind before determining which coding method is most likely to yield a substantive analysis. For this study, the researcher began the coding process by utilizing In Vivo coding. Saldana (2021) describes In Vivo coding as a first cycle coding method that uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record. Saldana (2021) recommends In Vivo coding for any type of qualitative study and refers to In Vivo as “my first “go-to” method with interview transcript data” (p. 138). By using this coding method to begin the data analysis process, the researcher was able to highlight important statements made by the participants during the interview process. This also allowed the researcher to preserve the participants’ meanings and views in the coding itself.

Saldana (2021) also references that after highlighting important statements and phrases, researchers should begin to attempt to organize these statements into specific categories. These categories were based on analysis of unobtrusive data collection, as well as an exhaustive literature review of restorative practices. Below in figure 5 are examples of how In Vivo Coding was used to highlight important participant words or phrases and then how those statements were assigned to specific categories.

Figure 5



Merriam (1998) advises that the researcher must continually analyze data during data collection in order to determine which direction to pursue as the research study develops. After placing the original In Vivo codes into categories, the researcher decided that another method was needed to best analyze the interview results. This was based on a careful review of the current analysis and on the recommendations of Saldana (2021) who recommends that In Vivo coding may limit the researcher's perspective of the data and that the researcher should be prepared to mix and match coding methods as they proceed with data analysis. In this study, the researcher chose to utilize Theming the Data as a second cycle coding method.

Saldana (2021) describes Theming the Data as

“Theming the Data: Categorically - Provides descriptive detail about the patterns observed and constructed by the analyst. Rather than using a short category label, a theme expands on the major ideas through the use of an extended phrase or sentence. The analytic goals are to develop an overarching theme from the data corpus, or an integrative theme that weaves various themes together into a coherent narrative” (p. 369).

Saldana goes on to state that these themes do not magically appear but are constructions or interpretations by the researcher. In order to better create these constructs or interpretations, Saldana recommends that researchers go “looking for trouble” by answering questions to generate thematic statements (p. 259). For this study, the researcher utilized this advice and answered the following questions using the In Vivo codes as a starting point:

- What were the participants’ personal beliefs about school discipline?
- What is the purpose of RP?
- What are the non-negotiables of RP implementation?
- What unresolved issues does the participant see because of RP implementation?
- What are the benefits of RP?
- What factors affect teacher support or buy-in for RP?
- What negative effects have you witnessed, or concerns do you still have?
- What advice does the participant have for others in regards for RP?

These questions were placed into larger categories based on the research questions for this study. These categories “How students/Staff experience RP at Your School”, “What are the effects of RP on the school/learning environment?”, and “RP Advice”. An excel

spreadsheet was created and participant responses were loaded. A sample of this sheet is shown below in figure 6.

Figure 6

		Administrators	Coach	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
	Personal Beliefs about Discipline	needing to be proactive, being clear with students, students knowing the why, opportunity to reflect and to learn, not just getting a consequence, some times it's only a consequence, ownership of their part, be a part of the process, have to be in control, need to be firm and more punitive, I give consequences, take new steps instead of just moving forward	students crave structure and discipline, kids want to learn, Not to always go for the stern response	Have engaging lessons, students not engaged, gauge their demeanor, knowing what to expect from each student, they don't want to be pulled out, We've always kiina done this	it was very much punitive, we paddled students, it was more aggressive forms of physical punishment, once you did that, a few that it did help, it set off something,
How do Students/ staff experience RP at your school?	What is the purpose of RP	becoming our best selves, teaching kids the why, being on the journey with them (students), trying to work with children, we do our best, give them an education, help kids to own, everyone's best interest in mind, treating children like human beings, helping them to learn behavior, to learn strategies and skills, helping them to learn these things (students), to use them through life, trully teaching them the SEL competicies, lots of pros, students becoming their best selves,	get the student to take accounatibility, just think and process, do what is bst for the school and students, connection can go a long way with helping students improve,	It's a safe place to come, we want students to be in class, they want to make a difference, it is the root of the problem, I would want to be treated like an adult,	counselingbased rather than lining the students up an paddling them, we want to help, to have more accountability in a calm structured setting, vested in every student, want every student to do well, its my responcibility as an adult, why are't you doing this, making sure that children are ok,
		be a part of the process, families be more in the process, reentry meetings happen (with a family member), take new steps instead of just moving forward,	Relationships with students, build a relationship wih students, needed to have a relationship, sominobak	Building relationships, take off my rose colored glasses, she really cares about me, maybe their just having a bad day, they need a break, having	have a good relationship, what they expect from you, needs to be grace on both sides, getting students to understand, know how your

This allowed the researcher to see patterns, and compare similarities and differences more clearly. From these patterns a list of themes emerged. In accordance with Saldana (2021), these themes were then grouped by category. Once these themes were placed in categories, they were condensed, and 3 central themes emerged. These themes will be presented in chapter 4.

### Trustworthiness and Rigor

When discussing the idea of trustworthiness and rigor in a qualitative study, Shenton (2004) recommends following Guba's guidelines, which involve the procedures that address a positivist criterion but applying it in a qualitative way- thus increasing the credibility of a study. Shenton (2004) refers to the idea of credibility as how the

researcher ensures that the study actually measures what it is intended to measure. On this topic, Bhattacharya (2017) states that the interpretation of qualitative research involves developing narratives about the ways in which the researcher is co-constructing meaning with their participants, and that this meaning must remain in alignment with other parts of the study to maintain the rigor of the study. In this study, the researcher worked with the dissertation team to ensure the inclusion of specific procedures that align the data collection and the data analysis processes. The researcher utilized the methods recommended by Saldana (2021) to guarantee that most appropriate coding techniques were utilized that allowed for the voices of the participants to come through in the data analysis process.

According to Bhattacharya, (2017) whatever one's approach to data analysis, there should be adequate depth and justification to detail how one was able to identify findings in one's study. Creswell (1998) recommends that researchers utilize safeguards during the data collection process in a qualitative study. According to Creswell (1998) Triangulation, which includes collecting data from multiple sources, is an important tool researchers can use when corroborating evidence collected during a qualitative study. This study accomplishes this in two key ways. The first is by combining interviews with unobtrusive data collection. Utilizing the historical data collection will provide context to the interview data and allow the researcher to provide context on how the implementation of RP school-wide compares to the experiences of the participants. The second is by interviewing multiple participants and cross analyzing their responses. The addition of the restorative practices specialist and the executive principal added a

different perspective that was compared to the two teachers allowing the researcher to look for similarities and possible conflicts. Hatch (2004) agrees with this approach, stating that the inclusion of unobtrusive data collection as a part of the research design offers several advantages. The primary advantage being is that it can provide insight into the social phenomenon under investigation without interfering with the enactment of that social phenomenon. Hatch (2004) adds that unobtrusive data can also help in the triangulation process because their nonreactive nature makes them one-step removed from participants' interpretations. However, Hatch (2004) warns that researchers should be aware that making meaning from unobtrusive data can rely heavily on the researcher's interpretations. This is especially true when used in isolation. This is why Hatch (2004) recommends, "triangulating unobtrusive data with data from other sources to improve confidence in reporting findings" (p. 121). The researcher in this study believes that the safeguards outlined above provides enough context to the interview data to be able to provide sufficient triangulation of the data.

Shenton (2004) also addresses the need for a study to show transferability, which means that the results of the study can be applied to that of a wider population. However, this is very difficult to account for with qualitative research. Due to the fact that the nature of qualitative work lies in the specific context in which it occurs. While this study is attempting to provide some transferability with the addition of multiple cases in different settings, the researcher in this case agrees with Shenton (2004), who argues that "readers must determine how far they can be confident in transferring to other situations the results and conclusions presented" (p. 70). This means that the researcher must

provide thick descriptions and be transparent about their research design and allow the reader to determine if the results are applicable in their context. Being that qualitative work is confined to its own context, it is difficult to recreate the same study or accurately confirm a study's findings. Thus, in order to improve the transferability of the study results the researcher must be clear when describing their procedures, methods, as well as their own subjectivity and involvement in the process.

The researcher would also like to address the possibility of his past experiences affecting the objectivity of this study. To address these concerns the researcher has attempted to clarify his own opinions and biases throughout the process. The researcher has maintained regular discussions about methods and findings with his dissertation committee during the process as a check on his objectivity. Another issue that could affect the objectivity of this study is the limited number of participants. Only choosing 4 participants could lead to choosing only staff members with positive views of RP. This issue will be kept in mind when analyzing results.

The fact that this study is being conducted in the district where the researcher works could also be viewed as an issue with objectivity. This could lead to the researcher being too embedded into the situation, which could cause him to overlook information or overlook trends in the data. Despite these concerns, this situation also has several possible positive impacts on the study. Conducting research in an area with this level of familiarity has provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the history of the school in the study, the neighborhoods, and student bodies involved; and how district policies and procedures could have affected the implementation process. Being inside the school district has also helped with developing relationships with the participants.

This could make participants more willing to share their experience in an open and honest way leading to more truthful findings. In order to minimize these concerns and maximize the benefits, the researcher has attempted to clarify his own biases during the process. The research has also attempted to combat this issue by selecting a school for the study where he has no personal connections.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the methodology the researcher utilized during this qualitative instrumental case study. The researcher also explained the rationale for this study and explored how their own biases and views could affect the data analysis process. Lastly, the trustworthiness and rigor of the study were examined. Chapter 4 goes on to present the findings in an attempt to answer the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of restorative practices in one Tennessee middle school and explore the staff's perceptions of their effect on the learning environment. As a part of the study, the researcher interviewed 4 participants from the chosen middle school. In order to provide additional context to the study, the researcher collected and examined four consecutive years of student

achievement data, student discipline data, and student attendance data: Year 1 (2016-2017), Year 2 (2017-2018), Year 3 (2018-2019), and Year 4 (2019-2020). This period includes the school's last year utilizing traditional discipline practices and years one through three of the restorative practices implementation process. The researcher chose not to include data from beyond 2020 due to effect of COVID-19 on school data. All data was provided by a school representative and gathered through the District's online data management system. While Chapter 3 of this study detailed the design and methodology utilized, this chapter will explain the above data and present the findings from the participant interviews in order to answer the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

### **School Profile**

The school chosen for this study is a middle school in a large urban Tennessee school district. While the School District has had several changes in leadership, this school has had consistent leadership over the last two decades. The current principal has been in her position for five years, and served as a teacher, literacy coach, and assistant principal for 10 years at the same school prior to becoming the executive principal. The school serves grades five through 10 and at the time of this study had an enrollment of 641 students. The school is located in a more affluent part of the city but has a zoned optional enrollment plan which allows students from more impoverished areas of the city

to attend. This policy is a part of the District's school choice policy and is designed to ensure all schools retain a diverse student body. A breakdown of the school's demographic information is shown below in figure 7. This is the list of the abbreviations in figure 6: ED = Economically Disadvantaged, ELL = English Language Learner, LEP = Limited English Proficiency, SWD = Student With Disability, # Language = number of languages spoken in the building.

Figure 7

Ethnicity		Gender		ED		ELL	
American Indian or Alaska Native (I)	0.17 %	F	47.77 %	Y	29.11 %	Y	25.51 %
Asian (A)	6.68 %	M	52.23 %	N	70.89 %	N	74.49 %
Black or African American (B)	25.68 %	LEP		SWD		# Languages	
Hispanic/Latino (H)	37.84 %	Y	37.67 %	Y	13.36 %	18	
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (P)	0.17 %	N	62.33 %	N	86.64 %		
White (W)	29.45 %						

### *Attendance Data*

The school attendance data is measured by Average Daily Attendance (ADA). It displays the percentage of students who are present each day. The table 4 below shows the average ADA for the years of the study. The table shows a slight increase in ADA from 94.54% in 2016-2017 to 95.21 in 2019-2020. This slight increase does place BMS above the district average for Average Daily Attendance.

Table 4

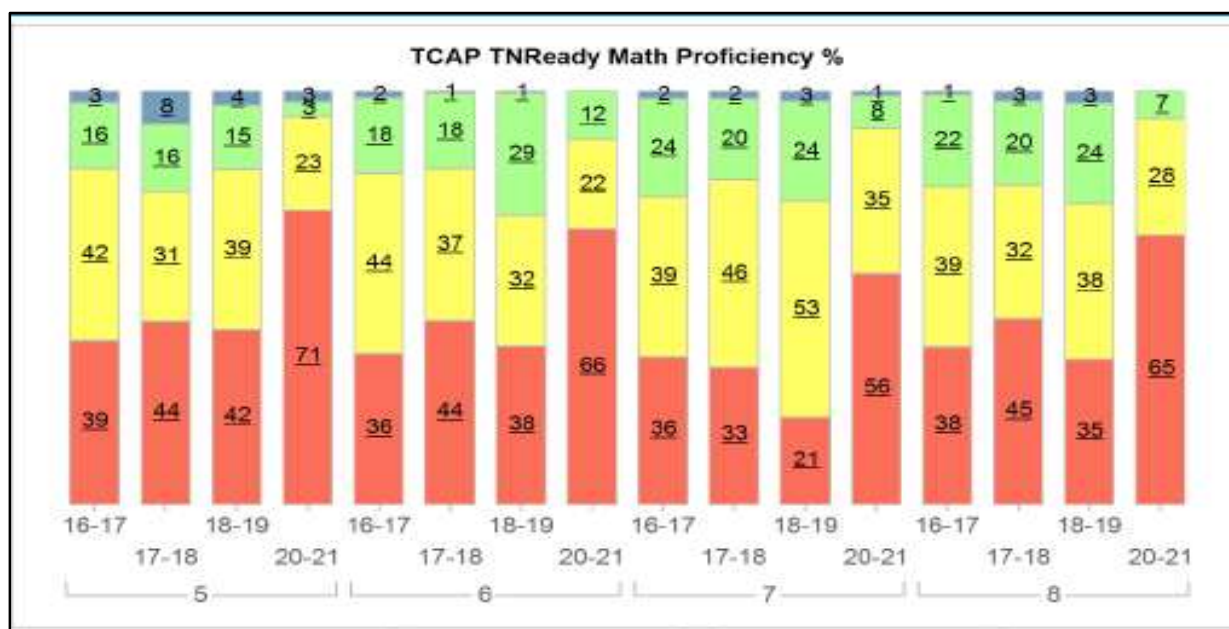
<b>BMS Average Daily Attendance</b>	
School Year	Percent of Students Present
2016-2017	94.54%

2017-2018	94.18%
2018-2019	94.83%
2019-2020*	95.21%

*Achievement Data*

The academic achievement data is comprised of TNReady scores in Math and English Language Arts. TNReady is the official state accountability test for Tennessee. It is given to all students in grades 3 through 8 each year in late April. The scores shown below in figure 8 display proficiency levels in math by grade level for 2016-2017 through 2020-2021 school years. There were no scores the 2019-2020 school year due to the pandemic.

Figure 8

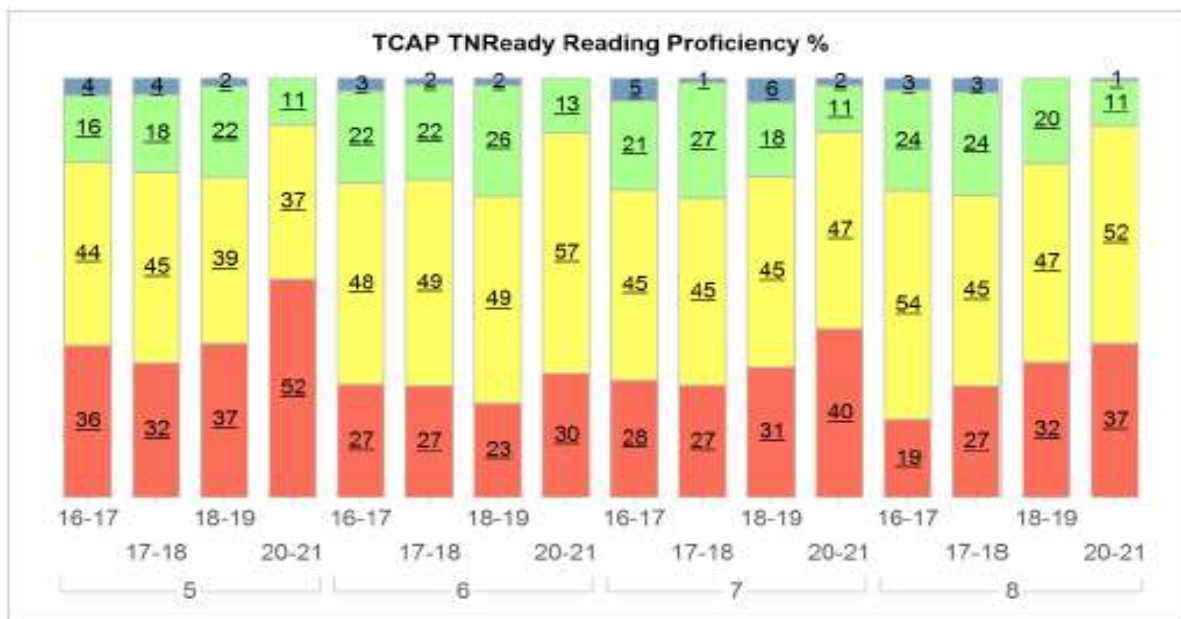


The color patterns shown above represent different levels of achievement. The lowest level is Below shown in red, next is Approaching shown in yellow, third is On Track shown in green, and the highest level is Mastered, shown in Blue. The State of

Tennessee considers students who score On Track or Mastered to be proficient in that subject. Overall, the school's math scores rose by 4 percent from 2016-2017 through 2018-2019. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade showed a ten percent increase, while the other grade levels either stayed consistent or showed a slight increase. No scores decreased. The scores from 2020-2021 were significantly lower. However, the pandemic ended the 2019-2020 school year in March and the 2020-2021 school year was greatly affected by the pandemic.

Figure 9 below shows proficiency levels in English Language Arts (ELA) by grade level for 2016-2017 through 2020-2021 school years. The categories for ELA are the same as math.

Figure 9



The scores for ELA are mixed. While they rose in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, they fell in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

### *Discipline Data*

Student discipline data is displayed below in table 5. The discipline data is divided by school year and broken into 6 categories. A behavior incident is any discipline infraction considered serious enough by the teacher that it warrants notifying the school principal and documenting it in the school database. The categories moving from left to right are the total enrollment of the school, the total number of behavior incidents that occurred each year, the total number of different students who had at least 1 behavior incident, the number of incidents that resulted in a restorative conference. Restorative conferences can take many forms but result in the affected parties involved in the incident having a discussion and coming to an agreement on how the offender can make amends for the harm done during the incident.

Table 5

School Year	Total Enrollment	Total Number of Behavior Incidents	Number of Unique Students with a Behavior Incident	Number of Behavior Incidents Resulting in Out of School Suspension (OSS)	Percent of students with a Behavior Incident	Number of Behavior Incidents Resulting in a Restorative Conference
2016-2017	632	622	191	144	30%	15
2017-2018	657	784	211	183	32%	162
2018 - 2019	688	935	228	177	33%	268

The chart shows that the total number of incidents rose each year with 2018-2019 having 213 more incidents than 2016-2017. The number of students with a behavior incident also rose during that time with 2018-2019 having thirty-seven additional students with a behavior incident. When accounting for enrollment that is a 3 percent increase over the

time frame. The number of suspensions was the highest in 2017-2018, but remained higher in 2018-2019 than in 2016-2017.

### **Initial Analysis of Interview Data**

For this qualitative instrumental case study, four participants were interviewed. All four participants worked at BMS for at least five years; placing them at the school for the first year of the RP implementation process. Of the participants, two were classroom teachers, one was a restorative practices specialist, and the other was the executive principal. Three of the participants were female and one was male. The participants experience levels ranged from six to 18 years in education. Each participant has had a different experience with restorative practices and offers a unique perspective. These interviews all lasted between 25 and 35 minutes and took place via an online platform. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The researcher then reviewed each transcript and completed a round of In Vivo coding. These codes were grouped into one of three primary categories based on initial research into RP and the research questions of this study. These categories included the following: restorative practices advice, how staff/students experienced restorative practices, and the effect of restorative practices on staff/students. How staff/students experienced restorative practices was divided into RP purpose/benefits and RP cons. While the effect of restorative practices on staff/students was divided into teacher perceptions and teacher support. These sub-categories were based on the literature review of RP and the initial round of In Vivo coding. The next section of this chapter will discuss each interview and highlight important codes that

emerged during data analysis. Transcripts of the questions asked to each participant and the In Vivo coding charts are included in the appendix.

*Dr. Wooten*

Dr. Wooten is the executive principal of BMS. She has been at BMS for fifteen years. She started as a teacher, then worked as a literacy coach, later as an assistant principal, and has now been the executive principal (EP) for the last 5 years. Dr. Wooten became the EP in 2017-2018. At this time, she had the whole school staff trained in trauma-informed practices and social emotional learning. The staff was also introduced to restorative practices for the first time during that same school year. During this process, each staff member attended a 2-day training on RP in the summer of 2018. Dr. Wooten also hired a full-time restorative practice specialist and instituted new discipline procedures for the school community. These procedures included a tiered structure for additional behavior supports and a “peace center” maintained by the RP specialist. The peace center provided a safe space for students to go when escalated.

Dr. Wooten’s interview gave the researcher an overview of the RP implementation process and discussed the reasoning for the schools shift to restorative discipline practices. During the interview, the majority of Dr. Wooten’s statements that stood out were placed in the RP advice category. Patterns that showed up in these statements included the need to be proactive, how to utilize consequences, placing an emphasis on relationship building, and the importance of staff and students “knowing the why”. Inside of these statements, Dr. Wooten also emphasized the need to fully train staff in RP and have clear structures in place before beginning the switch to RP.

The next largest number of statements from Dr. Wooten were in the how staff/students experienced RP category. Within this category, Dr. Wooten spoke the most about the overall purpose and benefits of RP. In this sub-category, she repeatedly referred to RP as teaching students life skills, stating that she believed the school was helping students in “becoming our best selves”. In the RP con sub-category, Dr. Wooten mentioned the difficulty of utilizing RP in schools, stating several times that the process takes time, it is a lot of work, and can be discouraging.

In the final category, Dr. Wooten spoke the most about teacher support. In this sub-category she discussed the need to support teachers, stating that “this cannot be all on teachers” and stressing the need for repeated trainings to ensure that all staff is on the same page. She also spoke about the need to have the “right people” and stated that “we had teachers to leave”. Other statements in this sub-category addressed differences between veterans and newer teachers, with Dr. Wooten stating that “newer teachers believe in it more” and that “old school teachers want control and value rules and authority”.

*Mr. Amis*

Mr. Amis is the restorative practices specialist for BMS. This is his 5<sup>th</sup> year at BMS and his second year as the RP specialist. Prior to that he was the In-School Suspension monitor for BMS. For his role, he had to participate in specific training to learn the school’s district expectations for this position. He was also required to have a college degree. There were no other requirements for this position.

During this interview, Mr. Amis briefly discussed his role in the school and how he fits into the overall school plan. Mr. Amis spends his days working with students in

the peace center, but also visits classrooms to meet with students, and helps with restorative conferences, provides restorative resolutions for teachers and students, and provides conflict mediation services. These conflict mediation services can be between students, students and teachers, or between staff members.

During the coding process, most Mr. Amis's statements were placed into the RP Purpose and Benefits sub-category. Within this sub-category, Mr. Amis spoke the most about the importance of relationships and students needing to know that the adult they are interacting with at the time actually cares about them, mentioning it 18 times during the interview. He also spoke about the need for teaching students how to take accountability for their actions and stated that RP had helped the overall school environment twice. However, several of Mr. Amis's statements were placed into the RP Cons sub-category. Within these statements Mr. Amis discussed the idea that RP does not work with all students and that the amount of time spent with these students can affect other students, stating that "students do watch", "they notice all", and "I don't get no recognition".

Within the category of the effect of RP on staff and students, Mr. Amis discussed that teacher perception of RP is that it can be too lenient or soft on discipline. He also discussed the need for all staff to work together to find better restorative solutions that work, while also questioning if it is possible for the school to solve all discipline problems. Stating that "I can only do so much", "some kids are not going to respond", and that "accountability needs to be shared by parents".

*Ms. Bryant*

Ms. Bryant is an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher. She has been teaching for 14 years and has spent her entire career at BMS. Teaching is a second career for Ms. Bryant, as

she originally majored in human and organizational development and spent 5 years working in the field of Human Resources. She first received her teaching license through a transition program for career professionals and has primarily taught math during her 14 years at BMS.

Due to her length of time at BMS, Ms. Bryant was able to give a unique perspective on the school's switch to RP. During the coding process for Ms. Bryant, there was no specific area that stood out. Her statements were spread out evenly amongst the different categories. Looking inside the first category for RP Advice, her statements are also balanced. She briefly touches on several different strategies and ideas 2-3 times each but there were no clear patterns.

Looking at the 2<sup>nd</sup> category of How Staff/Students Experience RP, there were twice as many statements that were placed into the sub-category of RP Purpose/Benefits as there were in RP Cons. One idea that repeated in the RP Purpose/Benefits sub-category, was the importance of students continuing to learn. These statements highlighted the need for schools to purposefully teach behavior skills. A few examples of those include; "students are learning more about themselves", "we are always learning things", and "learn how to repair harm". Ms. Bryant also repeatedly discussed the importance of developing relationships and having conversations. These types of statements were coded more than a dozen times in the interview. Other statements that were of note included "I would want to be treated like an adult", "it's a safe place to come", and "what is the purpose of coming to school". In the RP Cons sub-category, over half of Ms. Bryant's statements centered on the perceived impact of repeatedly disruptive students. These statements

included “is acting up over and over”, “same disruptive students”, “it takes away from other students”, and can really disrupt the learning environment”.

In the final category, Ms. Bryant made several comments that centered around teacher misconceptions or communication issues. Under the sub-category of Teacher Perception, the majority of her comments centered around teacher misunderstanding of the nature of RP. She made the statement that “there were so many misconceptions”. She also mentioned twice that teachers perceived RP as “all hugging and giving candy”. In the other sub-category of Teacher Support, she still highlighted the issue of students who are repeatedly disruptive. Here she highlighted that these students could cause teachers to not feel supported, stating that “come right back to the classroom”, “like they had won”, and “they’re like, Haha, you get me back”. Ms. Bryant also discussed the need for improved communication between staff and administration stating that a lack of communication can often lead to a lack of feeling supported.

*Ms. Noble*

The final interview was with Ms. Noble. Ms. Noble is currently a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher at BMS. She has been teaching for eighteen years. She began teaching at BMS for 4 years ago, which was the first year of RP implementation. Prior to that she taught in a more rural district which employed more traditional discipline strategies. Her varied experience in school demographics and discipline styles made her an excellent participant for this study.

During the coding process, most of Ms. Noble’s statements fell into the How Staff/Students Experience RP category, with over 70% of those being placed into the RP Purpose/Benefits sub-category. Within this sub-category, Ms. Noble’s highest

percentage of statements focused on the observable benefits of RP. A few examples of these statements are “they catch it early”, they learn to be patient and control themselves”, and “keeps kids calm that are struggling”. The next highest percentage of statements in this sub-category centered on adult responsibility. These statements included “we want to help”, “it’s my responsibility as an adult”, and “making sure children are ok”. The other sub-category under How Staff/Students Experience RP is RP Cons. This sub-category only represented 30% of statements in this category, but still had the third largest number of statements of the 5 sub-categories. These statements primarily highlight issues with disruptive students who have not responded to RP and the time consuming and possibly disruptive nature of the process. Here are a few examples of these statements: “had some heated exchanges”, “sometimes it causes issues”, “blowing up in the classroom”, “RP takes time, punitive is very quick”, and “you have two or three that want to continuously act out”.

### **Theming the Data**

After reviewing the In Vivo coding data, while there were patterns, there was no clear central idea or message. For this reason, the decision was made that a second cycle coding method was needed. Based on the In Vivo data, theming the data was chosen as this second cycle coding method. Saldana (2021) describes theming the data as a process where the researcher provides details about the patterns observed, but also can expand on the major ideas through the use of an extended phrase or sentence. The primary goal is to weave different themes together into a coherent narrative.

To generate thematic statements, the researcher began this process by using the existing in vivo codes to answer the following questions:

- What were the participants' personal beliefs about school discipline?
- What is the purpose of RP?
- What are the non-negotiables of RP implementation?
- What unresolved issues does the participant see because of RP implementation?
- What are the benefits of RP?
- What factors affect teacher support or buy-in for RP?
- What negative effects have you witnessed or concerns do you still have?
- What advice does the participant have for others in regards for RP?

An excel spreadsheet was created and these questions were then divided into the following categories: "How students/staff experience RP at your school", "What are the effects of RP on the school/learning environment?", and "RP Advice". Participant responses were loaded for each question and analyzed again looking for patterns and conflicts between the respondents. During this process 13 themes emerged. These themes include the following:

1. More accountability in a calm and more structured setting
2. A focus on building better relationships
3. Having real conversations with students
4. Balancing the relationship and consequence piece
5. Teaching skills needed in the real world
6. School culture has improved
7. Getting to know each other without the barriers
8. Teachers need to feel supported
9. RP is more time consuming

10. Repeatedly disruptive students can have a negative effect on other students
11. There is a need to remove some students from class
12. Misconceptions about the RP process can cause problems
13. Teachers need support and consistency

After the initial themes are highlighted, Saldana (2021) recommends that the researcher begin to look for what relationships may exist between them. Based on this approach, the researcher placed the identified themes into categories show below.

Table 6

The RP Experience	The Learning Environment	RP Advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting to know each other without the barriers</li> <li>• More accountability in a calm and more structured setting</li> <li>• A focus on building better relationships</li> <li>• Having real conversations with students</li> <li>• Balancing the relationship and consequence piece</li> <li>• Teaching skills needed in the real world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeatedly disruptive students can have a negative effect on other students</li> <li>• There is a need to remove some students from class</li> <li>• Repeatedly disruptive students can have a negative effect on other students</li> <li>• School culture has improved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers need support and consistency</li> <li>• Teachers need to feel supported</li> <li>• Misconceptions about the RP process can cause problems</li> </ul>

Based on the recommendation of Shaw (2019) a second cycle of theme development was completed. Shaw (2019) explains that the second cycle allows for the reconfiguration of the descriptive themes into a more interpretive array. The themes were analyzed inside of their categories. Utilizing these strategies, the existing descriptive themes were analyzed a second time inside their categories. Similar themes were combined, and three distinct central themes emerged. These central themes each had

three supporting themes and were recategorized based on the research questions for the study. These central themes can be seen in an outline format below.

RQ #1: How do teachers and administrators perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized?

- I. Improved culture with fewer discipline incidents
  - a. More accountability in a calmer, more structured setting
  - b. A focus on better relationships
  - c. A focus on teaching social and emotional skills
- II. Restorative Practices implementation is complex
  - a. Teachers need consistency and support from school administrators
  - b. The process can be time consuming
  - c. Misconceptions and miscommunications can lead to teachers feeling unsupported

RQ #2: How do teachers and administrators perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

- III. Restorative Practices does not work for all students
  - a. There is a need to balance relationships and consequences
  - b. Students need to be removed from class occasionally
  - c. Repeatedly disruptive students can have a negative effect on other students

These central themes were identified and organized by research questions.

The first research question included two central themes. The first stated that there was an improved culture with fewer discipline incidents. Although all participants discussed issues with RP, there was a consistent message that the overall school culture had improved since the school had switched to RP. From the views of the participants, the three supporting themes appeared to be indicators that lead to this improved school culture. The second central theme stating that RP implementation is complex was never explicitly stated by the participants but appeared after careful data review through the variety and complexity of the participants answers. The supporting themes in this

category include the need for consistency, time management, and clear communication. These supporting themes appeared heavily in the interview data. The final central theme was included under the second research question. This theme appeared to have more of an impact on the learning environment than on the specific experience of the participants. The idea that RP did not work for all students was a repeated theme throughout the coding process. All participants were clear that consequences were still needed and that students would occasionally need to be removed from class. Several participants also mentioned their belief that the actions of these repeatedly disruptive students had a negative effect on other students in class; by either being a negative influence, distracting students in class, or diverting the teachers attention away from instruction.

### **Summary**

This qualitative instrumental case study explored the implementation of Restorative Practices at one middle school in an urban Tennessee school district. This chapter presented the findings discovered during the study. It began with a detailed description of the school where the study took place. The chapter then presented important school level data during a 5-year window, beginning the year before the implementation of RP. Next, the researcher provided details about the four interview participants and explained how they were chosen. Interview data was presented and the coding process was detailed. Finally, the central themes that emerged were presented and shown in relation to the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment

in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices? These results will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter discusses the findings of this qualitative instrumental case study. The researcher begins by providing a summary of the study, reviews the previous four chapters, then moves into a discussion surrounding each interview. Next, the researcher discusses the findings for each research question and analyzes how those findings relate to previous studies on RP. Finally, the researcher reviews the implications of this study and presents some final thoughts and suggestions for future research on the topic.

### **Summary of the Study**

This qualitative instrumental case study examined teacher and administrator perceptions of restorative practices and their effect on the learning environment. The school chosen for this study is a large urban middle school in the middle Tennessee area. At the time of this study, the school was in its 5<sup>th</sup> year of the utilizing restorative practices. The researcher began the study by examining school-wide data over a five-year span. This data encompassed the final year the school utilized traditional discipline practices through year four of school-wide RP implementation. This data was reviewed to help guide interview questions and provide context when analyzing qualitative data.

The primary focus of this study was the experiences of four different school staff members. These staff members all shared their unique experiences with restorative practices during four separate, semi-structured interviews. These participants included a

school administrator, a restorative practices specialist, and two teachers. The interview data was then analyzed through multiple coding cycles in an attempt to answer the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

The researcher's primary purpose with this study is to contribute useful research in the support of educators who are looking for ways to improve discipline practices and produce more equitable outcomes for all students.

### **Summary of Previous Chapters**

Chapter one of this paper began by highlighting perceived issues with current discipline practices. These issues primarily center on the damage and ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline. Long term suspensions, expulsions, and zero tolerance policies, can have disastrous effects for the students, while providing little to no benefit to the school. These practices are also more utilized against minority students or students with disabilities than their white peers. This often leads to at risk students being pushed out of schools and into the "school to prison pipeline". Chapter 1 ended with brief review of the importance of a supportive school culture and introduced restorative practices as an alternative approach to the more traditional discipline practices.

Chapter Two provided a comprehensive literature review of restorative practices. It began with an overview of the evolution of discipline practices in US schools and detailed how traditional discipline approaches have evolved over time. The researcher

argued that traditional discipline approaches have become overused, are ineffective at changing student behavior, and have led to mostly negative student outcomes. This is especially true for minority students who are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline practices. The researcher then reviewed the idea of restorative practices as an alternative discipline strategy and clearly defined the major components of RP. Next, the researcher reviewed current research on RP, discussing both its strengths and possible limitations. The researcher then pointed out that although there is evidence for the effectiveness of RP, the research indicated that it provides the most benefits when paired with Social Emotional Learning strategies. The researcher goes on to argue that RP and SEL are compatible approaches that can be implemented together to transform school culture and support a school's ability to develop students' emotional intelligence. Lastly, the Researcher contends that while RP has shown positive results as an alternate approach to school discipline, the research literature on the outcomes of implementation is still emerging, and that there remains a need for additional research, especially in the following areas pertaining to RP: younger students, effective implementation strategies, professional development for teachers, and the effect on academic achievement, particularly in US schools.

Chapter three described the methodological approach for this study. In this chapter, the researcher began by reviewing the rationale for the study and examining why a qualitative research design was determined to be the best choice for this study. Next, the methodological approach was discussed. Then the participant selection, research site, and methods for data collection and analysis were explored in detail. Lastly, the trustworthiness and rigor of the study were discussed, and the researcher explored how

their own biases and views could affect the data analysis process. All steps were clearly defined to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Chapter four included a presentation of the findings discovered during the study and a detailed explanation of the data coding process. It began with a description of the school where the study took place. This description included a breakdown of the school demographic information and presented school-wide attendance, achievement, and discipline data covering a 5-year window, beginning the year before the implementation of RP. Next the researcher provided details about the four interview participants and explained how they were chosen. Interview data were presented, and the coding process was detailed. Finally, the central themes that emerged were presented and shown in relation to the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

### **Discussion of Findings**

This qualitative instrumental case study sought to examine staff members experiences with restorative practices and analyze their perceptions of how RP has affected their school's learning environment. An instrumental case study was chosen to gain a broader look at RP and its effect on the school as a whole. By choosing an instrumental case study, the researcher was able to examine school-wide data and the collective experiences of the participants. This allowed the researcher to have broader picture of how different people experience the phenomenon of RP in different situations.

#### *School-Wide Data Review*

In order to provide additional context, the researcher began this study by collecting and examining four consecutive years of unobtrusive school-wide data. This data ranged from 2016 through 2021 and included student achievement data, student discipline data, and student attendance data. This process was added to the study to help in the triangulation process and provide additional insight into the social phenomenon under investigation. Unobtrusive data are removed from participants' interpretations and can be an important tool when corroborating evidence collected during a qualitative study. For this study, the historical data collection provided context to the interview data and allowed the researcher to compare school-wide data to the experiences of the participants.

The first area reviewed was school-wide attendance. Increases in school attendance rates have been linked to increases in positive school climates, so finding a trend in this area could provide additional context to what is happening inside the building during the RP implementation process. The school's attendance data dropped slightly during the first full year of RP implementation and then rose slightly in the second year. The 3<sup>rd</sup> year showed a more significant increase, but due to the COVID-19 school closure in March, this data only included three-fourths of the school year. While this increase in attendance rates could be positive sign in regard to the school climate, the fact that the only significant increase came during a shortened school year makes this data inconclusive.

The data review of achievement rates during this same period produced similar results. While some scores increased, others decreased and there were no clear patterns. During the interview process, teachers did not express confidence in the academic

progress of their students. Several participants even expressed explicit concerns with students work ethic. Other concerns included the affect disruptive students had on the academic progress of their peers and a decreased amount of instructional time due to additional time dedicated to SEL and RP. Previous research validated these concerns, as very few previous studies on RP in schools have looked at RPs effect on academics. However, in this study the student achievement data appears unchanged and does not show any negative or positive affects to overall performance.

The review of the school-wide discipline data produced the most interesting results. While all participants expressed a similar perception that school-wide discipline had improved, the overall numbers were not as conclusive. During year one and two of RP implementation the number of discipline behaviors incidents and students with a behavior incident increased. However, school enrollment also increased keeping discipline rates at a similar percentage during the first two years on RP implementation. During year two, the number of students who received OSS decreased slightly and the number of students who participated in restorative conferences as a result of a behavior incident increased significantly. These numbers indicate a change in the school's response to behavior incidents. Depending on the outcomes of the restorative conferences, it could also correlate to the perception of an improved school climate. The data for 2019-2020, year three of implementation, was showing a slight decrease in the rates of overall discipline incidents but the number of OSS responses were down by more than 30 percent. However, these numbers were not included in the overall results due due to the COVID-19 school closure.

*Ms. Bryant Interview*

Ms. Bryant is an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher with 14 years of teaching experience. She started teaching later in life, having switched careers after spending several years working as a human resources manager. She has spent her entire educational career at BMS. During her interview she expressed personal support for the use of restorative practices. She felt that RP at its core is a more common-sense approach to discipline and that the school had always been using some aspects of the approach. She expressed that it could be truly empowering for students and looks at the real root of the problem. She felt that schools that implement it need to be open minded and look for what works for them.

She did express several concerns with RP. Her biggest issue was with both a perceived and real lack of consequences. She seemed to view other teachers as looking at the RP process as being weak on student discipline. Mentioning that some teachers thought that it was all “hugging kids and giving candy”. She expressed a concern that a lack of consequences could demonstrate to other students that the school did not take student misbehavior seriously. She also discussed that other teachers did not feel supported when a student would be sent to the office and eventually come back into the classroom without a consequence. This led to teachers losing power struggles in the classroom and a feeling of being unsupported.

She went on to elaborate on these concerns, stating that lack of communication was also a problem. She also stated that school leaders did not always communicate what happened with students when they leave the room. Insinuating that a student could have received a consequence but the teacher never received any details about

what occurred outside of the classroom. She believed that communication needed to be improved between teachers and administrators.

*Ms. Noble Interview*

Ms. Noble is currently a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher with eighteen years of teaching experience. She has only been at BMS for 4 years and spent the majority of career working in rural area schools. She had a much different perspective than the other participants. During the interview, she discussed how discipline was much more punitive at her previous schools. Stating that corporal punishment was actually still being used at her first school. She stated that while she did believe punishment had an effect on other students, harsh punishment, including corporal punishment often had a more negative affect on the student that it was applied too.

Overall, she had a positive perception of RP. She felt that RP was good for the kids and it helped to teach them needed life skills. She also felt that RPs focus on relationship building helped everyone. She expressed her belief that positive relationships were the most important aspect of classroom discipline. Similarly, she had a positive view of the effect of RP on academics. She expressed a belief that RP helped with academics by proactively dealing with student issues which led to more productive time for all students in class. This was a major difference between Ms. Noble and the other participants.

Despite her positive outlook, she did have some concerns about RP. This primarily centered around students who did not respond to the RP process and a continued support for teachers. Although she realized that her school still utilized consequences, she expressed concerns that a perceived lack of consequences led to

teachers feeling unsupported. She thought sometimes that a student needed to be removed from class. She felt this was especially true for students who were persistently disruptive. What to do with these persistently disruptive students was a pattern amongst the majority of the participants.

*Mr. Amis Interview*

Mr. Amis is in his 5<sup>th</sup> year at BMS and is currently in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year as the restorative practices' specialist for BMS. Prior to that he was the BMS In-School Suspension monitor. An ISS monitor and a restorative specialist are very different jobs and making this switch could be a difficult transition. ISS is very punitive in nature and often requires the person in charge utilize assertive discipline strategies. This means specific rules are set and students who do not follow those rules receive a specific punishment. Changing to a restorative specialist would require a mindset shift. This conflict in perspective was evident during Mr. Amis' interview, showing up in several of his answers.

For example, while Mr. Amis stated that he was in favor of the shift to RP, he also appeared to have several reservations about its effectiveness. He expressed several times that he didn't feel as though the consequences were harsh enough, stating that "schools today are way too soft on discipline". He also stated that students will push boundaries to see what they can get away with, and without a serious consequence, this behavior will continue. Moving on, he expressed concerns that this type of negative behavior will influence other students to act out in similar ways. While these thoughts run contrary to the primary principles of restorative practices, Mr. Amis still voiced other positive statements about RP.

One area he was in favor of improving was relationships. He thought that all relationships in the building needed to improve. Meaning, student to student, student to teacher, and teacher to teacher. He expressed that adults often discount students' feelings and thought that student voice should always be considered. He also suggested that student's families needed to be brought into the process on a more regular basis. Stating that involving parents could improve accountability for students and parents. He seemed to believe that too much was placed on schools. He thought parents needed to take on more of the burden stating that students spend more time at home and without parental assistance, there was only so much the school could do.

*Dr. Wooten Interview*

Dr. Wooten has been the executive principal of BMS for the last 5 years. She has been at BMS overall for fifteen years, serving as a literacy coach, an assistant principal, and then the executive principal. It was Dr. Wooten's decision to make the switch to RP after taking over as principal. She is a proponent of giving students a voice and allowing them to be a part of the discipline process. She wants students to be a participant, and not feel like it is something that is happening to them. She expressed several times that she thought that the switch was what was best for the kids. She understood that not all of the adults in the building agreed and was okay with some choosing to leave. Her focus was on students and she strongly believed that adults need to teach behavior. She stated several times that both the students and the adults need to understand the "why" of what the school is doing. Meaning that schools should be transparent with kids, so that they totally understand how their behavior affects others and why the adults are responding in

a certain way. She also believed that the adults need to be consistently reminded of how these new strategies are benefiting students.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do schools perceive and experience the discipline process in schools where restorative practices are emphasized? (2) How do schools perceive the effect student behavior has on the learning environment in schools that emphasize restorative discipline practices?

The previous chapter displayed specific themes that emerged during the coding process for each research questions. This section will provide additional discussion of those themes in more detail.

#### *Research Question #1*

During the coding process, two primary themes emerged for the first research question. The first of these themes that emerged stated; “improved culture with fewer discipline incidents”. This primary theme was expressed by all participants during the interview process. While a decrease in overall behavior incidents was not clear when reviewing the school-wide discipline data, all participants still believed that the school-wide implementation of restorative practices had resulted in fewer discipline incidents and a better school culture.

The secondary themes that supported the primary theme were listed as “more accountability in a calmer, more structured setting”, “ a focus on better relationships”, and “ a focus on teaching social and emotional skills”. These ideas came up repeatedly during the interview process and could provide clarity as to why all participants viewed

the school culture as being improved. The first of these was a focus on better relationships. All participants discussed the importance of building relationships and this on its own, could lead to an improved school culture. The next important perception was that RP required more accountability from students. Several participants discussed the belief that RP required more of students after an incident had occurred. This belief combined with that amount of structure required to implement RP school-wide could have led to the perception of an improved school culture.

The second primary theme that emerged for research question one stated that “restorative practices implementation is complex”. The implementation of restorative practices can be a very complicated process, and the literature review from chapter two of this paper and the experiences of the participants in this study confirm that idea. Restorative process is based on personal relationships. For this reason, each discipline incident can be treated in a slightly different way. This can lead to lengthy and complex interactions. This idea was indicated in the secondary themes which included; “teachers need consistency and support from administrators”, “the process can be time consuming”, and “misconceptions and miscommunications can lead to teachers feeling unsupported”.

All participants worried about teachers feeling unsupported and often cited misconceptions about RP or lack of communication between teachers and administrators as the reason. The participants felt that there was a strong need for administrators to provide clarity, consistent communication, and support for teachers. Often times, acting in a restorative manner can seem counterintuitive for teachers and staff members. Benson and Fiarman (2021) warn that leaders should expect resistance when instituting these

types of practices, stating that policies that require us to act counter to our learned instincts require changing mindsets.

*Research Question #2*

Only one primary theme emerged for research questions two. It stated that “restorative practices do not work for every student”. This is the more controversial of the three themes. There is a real fear in education that keeping disruptive students in the classroom can have a negative effect on the other students. While this study did not get to the essence of this question, it did show that there are students in this school who do not appear to be responding to either traditional discipline responses or restorative responses. These students came up repeatedly during the interview process and the teachers believe that their actions are negatively affecting the other students. Either by influencing them to repeat that behavior or by stealing instructional time from them due to the attention required to deal with constant classroom disruptions.

The secondary themes that emerged to support this primary theme included; “there is a need to balance relationship building and consequences”, “students need to be removed from class occasionally”, and “repeatedly disruptive students can have a negative effect on other students”. All participants believed that consequences were still needed and should play a role in the discipline process. All participants also stated that they believed not all behavior can be dealt with efficiently inside the classroom, and that there was still a need for students to be removed from the classroom on occasions. Some participants also mentioned the need for teachers to have a break from dealing with the students who can be persistently disruptive. This statement indicated the participants’

perception of how administrators can provide support for teachers and their belief that instructional time should be as protected as possible.

### **Implications for Practice**

As discussed earlier in this study, restorative practices emerged over the last decade as a response to issues with traditional exclusionary discipline practices. One key criticism of exclusionary discipline practices is that they can disregard the role of the organization in shaping student behavior, leading to the belief that these students have forfeited their right to an education (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014). While sometimes necessary, the overuse of exclusionary practices can have disastrous effects on the students and their communities. When a school or district assumes a student has forfeited the right to an education, it is essentially pushing the burden of educating this student on to someone else. If schools are going to exclude large numbers of students from the educational process there needs to be a plan on how to deal with them. With these issues in mind, restorative practices could prove to be a useful tool.

Opponents of RP disagree with this idea. They argue that the restorative process places too heavy of a burden on teachers. They believe that RP forces teachers into more of a counseling role, one that they have not been adequately trained to fulfill. However, this does not have to be the case. While teachers are an essential part of the restorative process, the entire burden does not have to be placed on them to handle these situations in the classroom. Schools should create structures that allow both students and teachers to seek additional help when needed. Schools should build in avenues for students to seek out outside counselors or restorative specialists to assist when they are struggling emotionally or need help managing conflict with others. The purpose of the teacher in

this process should be to lay down the groundwork by focusing on building community within their classrooms and establishing relationships with the students. This serves as the foundation when outside help steps in to assist with restoring harm done to the community or mediating conflict between students.

While restorative practices can be a useful tool for schools trying to improve school culture and improve discipline outcomes, we learn from this study that teachers do not see it as a solution that can solve all discipline related problems. To combat this, the researcher recommends that schools combine restorative practices with other approaches to look at student behavior in a wholistic way. When RP is combined with social emotional learning, schools can focus on teaching behavior in a similar way as to how they teach academics. With this approach, teachers can use specific curriculum to actively teach certain behavior skills either directly or indirectly inside the classroom. With this in mind, Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) argue that "Part of the work with supporting RP is helping schools to demystify skill building so that teachers and staff can respond with needed skill building strategies during times of conflict or when negative behaviors arise" (p. 113).

While the combination of RP and SEL can provide a great foundation for students, there will be certain students that still need additional assistance. For these students, schools should look at providing additional individualized support. This process should be similar to the Response to Intervention system designed to provide additional interventions for students who need additional support academically. According to Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) this "multi-tiered prevention logic" has created an opportunity to integrate trauma-informed approaches into schools and "are

built on foundations involving early identification of risk, varied levels of intervention support designed to teach skills and prevent more serious problems, and continual data-driven evaluation of response” (p. 144). These multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) allows schools to identify, provide appropriate behavioral interventions, and monitor student progress. Schools who care about improving student outcomes, should look at utilizing all their resources in an intentional way.

### **Study Limitations and Future Research**

While the researcher worked at creating an exhaustive overview of BMS’s implementation of restorative practices, there is still several limitations to this study. The first limitation is with the review of school-wide data. While the interviews took place toward the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the last full year of data that was included in the study was from 2018-2019. This was primarily due to the effect of COVID-19. The 2019-2020 school year was cut short and a large portion of the 2020-2021 school year was conducted virtually. Both of which had a dramatic effect on all forms of data. This issue could explain why there was a difference between participants perception of a decrease in discipline incidents and the amount indicated in the data reviewed. Another issue with the data overview was a lack of a detailed indication of discipline responses. The researcher was able to review the number of restorative conferences and OSS responses, but ISS responses were not included. There could have been a huge decrease in ISS which could also affect teacher perceptions.

The researcher would also liked to have had an opportunity to review additional data measuring school culture. Each year students and staff at BMS take a large survey

answering questions about school culture and safety. This data could give a clearer indication of how a majority of staff and students feel about the school. Looking at this data for different years could also show possible trends. The researcher was unable to locate this data for the study but believes that it would have given a clearer picture of the school environment. A second area of data that was missing was a breakdown of discipline incidents and responses by subgroup. According to Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson (2002) discipline referrals originating in the classroom make up the vast majority of gaps between black and white student suspensions. Since a portion of the popularity of RP is in response to the discipline gap between whites and other minority groups, being able to look at discipline responses by ethnicity would have allowed for another viewpoint to measure the effectiveness of RP.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

While this study does show promise that RP can be an effective tool for improving school culture it also leaves several unanswered questions. One of these questions would be how effective is RP at addressing the discipline gap. As discussed earlier in this paper, Kevick et al. (2020) points out that a large portion of the most current and published research on restorative practices are studies out of the United Kingdom. This means that there is still a huge need for additional scientific studies within the US. These studies should focus on the how RP affects the discipline gap, especially for African American students and students with disabilities.

This study was also completed at a middle school, which is where a large portion of studies on this topic have occurred. Since RP has gained popularity, it has begun to be implemented at all levels. However, there has been almost no research on how younger

students respond to these practices. The concepts in RP can be abstract and could be difficult for younger students to grasp at times. Further research in this area is critical moving forward.

For this study, the teacher perception that RP does not work for all students is the most controversial finding. While the research of Kennedy-Lewis (2014) has looked closely at students who are persistently disciplined, there has been little that has centered on RP and these students. Kennedy-Lewis' (2014) research indicated that persistently disciplined middle school age students need educators who are capable of what she calls the simultaneously implementation of care, curriculum, and classroom management. The indication is that not only do these students need teachers with good classroom management skills and engaging lessons, but they also need to be able to establish personal connections with their teachers in order to be successful. While these findings point to RP and its emphasis on establishing relationships as promising, it does not specifically look at RP as a discipline strategy. The researcher believes this should be a priority for future research. Future researchers should look specifically at students who are persistently disruptive and attempt to determine the effect that different RP strategies have on their behavior in an attempt to establish if their needs can be met in the general educational classroom.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative instrumental case study attempted to examine teacher and administrator perceptions of restorative practices and their effect on the learning environment. This study found that the participants perceive restorative practices as having a positive effect on school culture. Its focus on building relationships helps

students and teachers establish caring communities in classrooms. The preventative portions of RP and conflict mediation gives students a voice and helps to teach life skills on how to successfully deal with conflict and get along with peers. Teachers also perceive RP as increasing student accountability, as most incidents require students to take accountability and repair any harm done. However, while its positive effects are clear, there are still several questions that need to be addressed in regards to its overall effectiveness.

The primary issue that arose from this study deals with students who have not responded to restorative strategies. In her research Kennedy-Lewis (2014) suggests that these students need teachers are highly trained and capable. She adds that teachers need to ensure that the curriculum is accessible for all students and that teachers know their students and the community well. To accomplish this, she recommends that schools help teachers, whose cultural backgrounds differ from their students, find ways to engage and seek knowledge from the community. She also suggests that schools focus professional development on care, curriculum, and classroom management. These suggestions seem to go further than RP, and set a high bar for schools with students who are persistently disciplined. Further research in this area, with concrete recommendations for school leaders would be beneficial.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

# ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVIEW ON HOW RP AFFECTS THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

## Dissertation Study MTSU Spring 2022

**Introduction:** My name is [Interviewer's Name] and I am here with [Participant's Name]. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your perceptions regarding school discipline and restorative practices. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. During the interview, you can skip any question and you can stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, but I will be recording this interview for my records.

Can you confirm that you received a copy of the consent form? (Participant Response).

If you consent to participating in this study, please say "yes" and today's date (Participant Response). Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Questions:**

1. Can you tell me your position and how long you have worked at this school?
2. Can you discuss your personal philosophy on the best ways to deal with student misbehavior?
3. What affect does student misbehavior on the learning environment? How does the school's response matter?
4. Can you discuss your school's philosophy on dealing with student behavior? How has that policy changed during your tenure here?
5. When did your school begin to use restorative practices? School-wide?
6. Can you describe the implementation process? What structural changes were made? How were staff trained?
7. How are new staff trained?
8. What is your perception of how dealing with student behavior has changed since the switch to RP?
9. What is your perception of how staff has felt about the switch to RP? Have you noticed a difference in how new teachers perceive RP compared to more seasoned teachers?
10. How has RP affected the school climate and culture? What effect do you believe that RP has had on attendance rates, enrollment, and discipline data?
11. What affect if any, has RP had on the overall learning environment and student achievement?
12. Have you had any students that you felt did not respond to RP? What happened? What affect did this situation have on you, the other students, and the learning environment?
13. What advice would you have for other schools looking to switch to RP?

## Appendix B

# TEACHER INTERVIEW ON HOW RP AFFECTS THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**Dissertation Study MTSU Spring 2022**

**Introduction:** My name is [Interviewer's Name] and I am here with [Participant's Name]. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your perceptions regarding school discipline and restorative practices. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. During the interview, you can skip any question and you can stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, but I will be recording this interview for my records.

Can you confirm that you received a copy of the consent form? (Participant Response).  
If you consent to participating in this study, please say "yes" and today's date (Participant Response). Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Questions:**

1. Can you tell me your position and how long you have worked at this school? Previous Teacher positions?
2. Can you discuss your personal philosophy on the best ways to deal with student misbehavior? How has your philosophy changed over time?
3. What affect does student misbehavior have on the learning environment? How does the school's response matter?
4. Can you discuss your school's philosophy on dealing with student behavior? How has that policy changed during your tenure here?
5. How does your personal classroom management plan and the school's plan connect? If teacher mentions RP, ask for specific examples of classroom practices.
6. What is your perception of how other staff has felt about the switch to RP? How has the switch to RP affected the school climate and culture?
7. What affect if any, has RP had on the overall learning environment and student achievement?
8. What is your perception of the effectiveness of the school at managing student behavior? What has been the effect of their discipline strategies on the learning environment? (Ask for examples)
9. Have you had any students that you felt did not respond to RP? What happened? How did the school support you? What affect did this situation have on you, the other students, and the learning environment?
10. What could the school do differently?

## Appendix C

# RESTORATIVE PRACTICES SPECIALIST INTERVIEW ON HOW RP AFFECTS THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

## Dissertation Study MTSU Spring 2022

**Introduction:** My name is [Interviewer's Name] and I am here with [Participant's Name]. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your perceptions regarding school discipline and restorative practices. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. During the interview, you can skip any question and you can stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, but I will be recording this interview for my records.

Can you confirm that you received a copy of the consent form? (Participant Response). If you consent to participating in this study, please say "yes" and today's date (Participant Response). Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Questions:

1. Can you tell me your position and how long you have worked at this school? Previous Teacher positions?
2. Can you discuss your personal philosophy on the best ways to deal with student misbehavior? How has your philosophy changed over time?
3. What affect does student misbehavior have on the learning environment? How does the school's response matter?
4. Can you discuss your school's philosophy on dealing with student behavior? How has that policy changed during your tenure here?
5. What is your perception of how other staff has felt about the switch to RP? How has the switch to RP affected the school climate and culture?
6. What is your perception of the effectiveness of the school at managing student behavior? What has been the effect of their discipline strategies on the learning environment? (Ask for examples)
7. What affect if any, has RP had on student learning?
8. Have you had any students that you felt did not respond to RP? What happened? How did the school support you? What affect did this situation have on you, the other students, and the learning environment?
9. What could the school do differently?
10. Anything I didn't ask that you would like to add?

## Appendix D

**IRB**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
 Office of Research Compliance,  
 010A Sam Ingram Building,  
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd  
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129  
 FWA: 00005331/IRB Regn. 0003571



## IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Monday, July 18, 2022

**Protocol Title** *Exploring Assessment, Learning and Student Success*  
**Protocol ID** *22-2014 7qvi*

**Principal Investigator** *Kevin Krahenbuhl (Faculty)*  
**Co-Investigators** *Bryanna Licciadi, Casey Campbell, and Abigail Spaziani (aes7u)*  
**Investigator Email(s)** *kevin.krahenbuhl@mtsu.edu*  
**Department** *Educational Leadership*  
**Funding** *NONE*

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU IRB through the EXPEDITED mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action is tabulated below.

<b>IRB Action</b>	APPROVED for ONE YEAR		
<b>Date of Expiration</b>	10/31/2022	<b>Date of Approval:</b> 11/1/21	<b>Recent Amendment:</b> 7/15/22
<b>Sample Size</b>	FIVE HUNDRED (500)		
<b>Participant Pool</b>	<b>Target Population:</b> Primary Classification: General Adults (18 or older) Specific Classification: Administrators, teachers, and professionals working in educational settings		
<b>Type of Interaction</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-interventional or Data Analysis <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Virtual/Remote/Online Interaction <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In person or physical interaction – Mandatory COVID-19 Management		
<b>Exceptions</b>	Click here to enter text.		
<b>Restrictions</b>	1. Mandatory SIGNATURE Informed Consent (in person). 2. Other than exceptions listed above, identifiable data/artifacts, such as, audio/video data, photographs, handwriting samples, personal address, driving records, social security number, and etc., MUST NOT be collected. Recorded identifiable information must be deidentified as described in the protocol. 3. Mandatory Final report (refer last page). 4. CDC guidelines and MTSU safe practice must be followed		
<b>Approved Templates</b>	IRB Templates: Recruitment Email and In person Informed Consent Non-MTSU Templates: Follow up emails and interview information		
<b>Research Inducement</b>	NONE		
<b>Comments</b>	NONE		

## Post-approval Requirements

The PI must read and abide by the post-approval conditions (Refer "Quick Links" in the bottom):

- **Reporting Adverse Events:** The PI must report research-related adversities suffered by the participants, deviations from the protocol, misconduct, and etc., within 48 hours from when they were discovered.
- **Final Report:** The PI must close-out this protocol by submitting a final report before **10/31/2022** (Refer to the **Continuing Review** section below); **REMINDERS WILL NOT BE SENT**. Failure to close-out or request for a continuing review may result in penalties including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol and/or withholding student diploma.
- **Protocol Amendments:** An IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as: addition/removal of subject population or investigating team; sample size increases; changes to the research sites (appropriate permission letter(s) may be needed); alterations to funding; and etc. The proposed amendments must be clearly described in an addendum request form. The proposed changes must be consistent with the approval category and they must comply with expedited review requirements.
- **Research Participant Compensation:** Compensation for research participation must be awarded as proposed in Chapter 6 of the Expedited protocol. The documentation of the monetary compensation must Appendix J and **MUST NOT** include protocol details when reporting to the MTSU Business Office.
- **COVID-19:** Regardless whether this study poses a threat to the participants or not, refer to the COVID-19 Management section for important information for the PI

### Continuing Review (Follow the Schedule Below)

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years by requesting a continuing review before **10/31/2022**. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual progress report; **REMINDERS WILL NOT BE SENT**. Failure to obtain an approval for continuation will result in cancellation of this protocol.

Reporting Period	Requisition Deadline	IRB Comments
First year report	9/30/2022	NOT COMPLETED
Second year report	9/30/2023	NOT COMPLETED
Final report	9/30/2024	NOT COMPLETED

### Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would fit within this approval category. **Only TWO procedural amendments will be entertained per year** (changes like addition/removal of research personnel are not restricted by this rule).

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
01/11/2022	Bryanna Licciardi (CITI 10617570) is added to the protocol.	IRBA2022-320
02/10/2022	Casey Cambell (cwc2m – CITI7860369) is added to the protocol.	IRBA2022-331
07/15/2022	Abigail Spaziani (aes7u – CITI10220035) is added to this protocol.	IRBA2022-377

### Other Post-approval Actions:

The following actions are done subsequent to the approval of this protocol on request by the PI or on recommendation by the IRB or by both.

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE	NONE

### COVID-19 Management:

The PI must follow social distancing guidelines and other practices to avoid viral exposure to the participants and other workers when physical contact with the subjects is made during the study.

- The study must be stopped if a participant or an investigator should test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the research interaction. This must be reported to the IRB as an "adverse event."
- The MTSU's "Return-to-work" questionnaire found in Pipeline must be filled by the investigators on the day of the research interaction prior to physical contact.
- PPE must be worn if the participant would be within 6 feet from the each other or with an investigator.
- Physical surfaces that will come in contact with the participants must be sanitized between use

Institutional Review Board, MTSU

FWA: 00005331

IRB Registration: 0003571

- **PI's Responsibility:** The PI is given the administrative authority to make emergency changes to protect the wellbeing of the participants and student researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the PI must notify the IRB after such changes have been made. The IRB will audit the changes at a later date and the PI will be instructed to carryout remedial measures if needed.

**Data Management & Storage:**

All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additional Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (refer "Quick Links" for MTSU policy 129 below). The data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects.

The MTSU IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board  
Middle Tennessee State University

**Quick Links:**

- Post-approval Responsibilities: <http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php>
- Expedited Procedures: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExpeditedProcedures.php>
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: <https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php>