
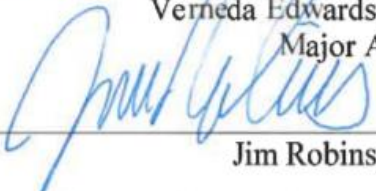



**The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of Teacher Perceptions**

Justin A. Bogart  
B.S., Kansas University, 1994  
M.A.S.L., Baker University, 2001

Submitted to the Graduate Department and Faculty of the School of Education of  
Baker University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Verneda Edwards, Ed.D.  
Major Advisor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jim Robins, Ed.D.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ben Boothe, Ed.D.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the perspectives of teachers regarding the impact of the use of restorative practices on school climate. Specifically, this research study focused on teacher perceptions of the impact of restorative practices on the elements of school climate as defined by the National School Climate Center (NSCC) (2017): school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, the institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships. The review of literature opens with a discussion of the origins, history, and theory of restorative justice from which school-specific restorative practices emerged. Teacher perceptions of restorative practice are reviewed and the literature review concludes with a discussion of the relationship between restorative practices and the elements of school climate. To measure teacher perceptions, a cross-sectional survey was distributed electronically to 98 teachers who worked in a high school in which restorative practices were embedded schoolwide. From the responses of the 24 teacher-respondents, which were analyzed by one-sample *t* tests, the researcher determined that teachers agree that the use of restorative practices improves feelings of safety among students and adults, improved supportive teaching practices, increased respect and social support for both adults and students, enhanced students' feelings of connectedness toward their school, clarified the administrators' vision for the school and support for the school's staff, and developed professional relationships among the staff that fostered effective working and learning. The results of the study support the idea that restorative practices can be worth the required investment of resources to address student behavior in a manner that decreases

the application of punitive disciplinary measures and increases positive relationships among students, their peers, and their teachers.

## **Dedication**

To my mother, Susan Snow Bogart.

I loved to read, but you made me a reader. Thank you.

To my father, Michael Len Bogart.

You inspired my journey in education, and you told me that one day, I would do this.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Disruptive student behavior not only interrupts the environment of a school classroom but also poses a threat to overall school climate. Teachers who must daily manage student behaviors that interfere with both instruction and the learning of more compliant students suffer increasing levels of stress and reduced morale. Increased stress and loss of morale accumulate among teachers and corrupt their sense of safety and belonging within the school community (Phillips, 2018). Furthermore, students who are suspended and, perhaps, expelled, as a result of their behavior, are more at-risk of failing or dropping out (Jones et al., 2018). Moreover, students who have been suspended report a loss of connection to the school even after returning (Golson, 2018; McMorris, Beckman, Shea, Baumgartner, & Eggert, 2013). School leaders, challenged with supporting teachers in reducing negative student behaviors and increasing student achievement, find that traditional exclusionary discipline policies that apply suspensions and expulsions to misbehaving students actually work against these outcomes (Jones et al., 2018). Students who return from suspensions often demonstrate increased misbehavior that negatively impacts the school environment (Virginia Department of Education, 2008). Finding evidence for the overuse of suspension through a study of school discipline policies, Fenning et al. (2012) recommended more “proactive and creative” (p. 131) alternatives in response to student misbehavior. Jones et al. (2018) reported the growth of restorative practices as a more “mainstream” (p. 14) strategy among schools in the effort to curb negative student behavior, increase student achievement, and improve the school climate.

In their application as a behavior-management tool, restorative practices provide an opportunity for school personnel, principally teachers and administrators, to develop positive relationships with and between students to reduce student misbehavior and to create a more effective learning environment in a school. Restorative practices, used in place of punitive disciplinary systems, often serve to restore to the student and the school personnel a sense of community (Golson, 2018). Restorative practices as a disciplinary system are used as an opportunity to develop relationships between staff and students, especially those students without the cultural and social resources to be successful in and out of school (Lustick, 2016). Using restorative practices to curb student misconduct and to build effective relationships among the members of a school community offers the potential to improve the overall climate of a school.

### **Background**

The National School Climate Center (2017) defined school climate as the “quality and character of school life” (para. 3) composed of the interrelated elements of school norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) further clarified that school climate encapsulates the multiple dimensions of school life that are social, emotional, ethical, academic, and environmental in nature. These elements work in harmony to ensure the safety of the people within the school. The implementation of restorative practices to address student misbehavior can improve school climate when the responses to student misbehavior shift from being punitive to reparative (Guckenburg, Hurley, Persson, Fronius, & Petrosino, 2015).



Restorative practices can be utilized as a response to disruptive student behavior that is sometimes violent, rather than the use of more traditional responses of exclusionary policies that include in- and out-of-school suspensions and even expulsion. As these suspensions and expulsions contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline that Lustick (2016) described, school leaders and teachers have turned to restorative practices that are intended to keep misbehaving students in school through both proactive and reactive strategies (Golson, 2018). These strategies are designed to help the offending student understand how his or her behavior corrodes the climate of the school and the intrapersonal relationships established within it.

A response to the increase of in- and out-of-school suspensions as a result of punitive disciplinary methods that stemmed from zero-tolerance policies, restorative practice methods have been implemented by teachers and school leaders to reduce student suspensions and expulsions by helping the offender understand how their behavior harms the interpersonal relationships and climate within the school (Golson, 2018; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). Both building leaders and teachers utilize restorative practices to replace traditional, and, often, punitive systems and structures with policies and practices designed to repair relationships between the offending student and the school community (Hopkins, 2004; Morrison, 2007). Restorative practices (RP) evolved from the principles of restorative justice used within the criminal justice system (Hunt, 2018; Mayworm, Sharkey, Hunnicutt, & Schiedel, 2016). Practitioners of restorative justice emphasized repairing the harm done to a person or community by an offender rather than punishing the offender. Guckenburg et al. (2015) defined restorative justice as a system that included the more specific mechanisms of “restorative practices”

and “restorative approaches” (footnote, p. 1). Alger (2018) connected restorative justice to the school setting: restorative practices and restorative approaches work to “repair . . . harm through restoration in other settings such as schools” (p. 26).

In measuring the effectiveness of RP as an alternative to exclusionary discipline methods, researchers reported general support for the implementation of RP in schools (Mayworm et al., 2016). Through its history and the research of its use, RP have been shown to result in benefits including a heightened sense of safety in schools (Golson, 2018), the improvement of student-teacher relationships (Acosta et al., 2016; Kaveney & Drewery, 2011), positive teacher attitudes towards the practice (Hamilton, 2008; Reimer, 2011), reports by students of positive emotional responses towards and from teachers (Grossi & dos Santos, 2012), and improved school climate (Golson, 2018; Hantzopoulos, 2013; Kaveney & Drewery, 2011). These general findings support both the continued implementation of RP in schools and the research of its effectiveness.

For this study, the researcher surveyed teachers from an urban secondary school in which restorative practices were utilized across the building. Participating teachers answered items on the study’s survey instrument, *The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of Teacher Perceptions* (Appendix A). According to the 2018 Kansas Building Report Card for this school (Kansas State Department of Education, 2019), 96.8% of teachers at this school were fully licensed. The teachers worked in an urban Kansas school district with a population of 1281 students in grades 9 through 12. In 2018, the multi-ethnic student population was comprised of 32.9% White, 38.8% Hispanic, 15.9% African American, and 12.4% classified as Other. In socioeconomic terms, 82.8% of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged.

## **Statement of the Problem**

School leaders, charged with the responsibility of creating a positive learning environment and responding effectively to student misbehavior, have acknowledged a need for alternative modes of discipline that would support the changing of negative student behavior and the improvement of the school's climate. Research on exclusionary discipline models revealed that the use of suspension has little to no impact on changing student behavior over the long term and that these exclusionary policies are inequitably applied to Black and Hispanic students, especially males (Arcia, 2006; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). Multiple studies exist on the potential benefits to students of implementing RP (Golson, 2018; Hamilton, 2008; Zulfa, 2015). Acosta et al. (2016), Lustick (2016), and Golson (2018) cited the use of RP as a method to resolve student misbehavior without resorting to exclusionary discipline practices including suspensions and expulsions. Lustick (2016) indicated that the use of RP reduced both student suspensions and the school-to-prison-pipeline. In addition, some research results suggest RP leads to greater student achievement (Armour, 2014; Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014; Jones, 2013; McMorris et al., 2013; Mullett, 2014). Teachers in Kaveney and Drewery's (2011) study of classroom circle meetings in a New Zealand high school reported feelings of satisfaction as RP strategies improved the classroom learning environment. Research results have suggested that exclusionary discipline practices are not only detrimental to student achievement, but also erode the trust between members of a school community that is critical to improved school programs and school improvement plans (Jones et al., 2018). Jones et al. (2018) discussed how the use of RP builds a sense of community in making connections with and supporting students.

By contrast, Lustick (2016) offered conflicting reports of teacher satisfaction with the use of RP and reported that teachers implementing RP strategies felt unsure how else to manage student behavior problems. As reported by Kafka (2011), teachers wanted the full support of administrators in managing student misbehavior and they have argued that educating problematic students was not the responsibility of general education classroom teachers. Teachers who held more authoritarian views of punishment may view alternative discipline policies as ineffective in holding students accountable (Hunt, 2018) and even permissive of student misbehavior (Alger, 2018). Existing research on RP as a disciplinary method reveals a gap in the understanding of teachers' perceptions of RP's impact on school climate. Few studies (Alvis, 2015; Bebee, 2015) have addressed the use of school-wide restorative practices and teacher perceptions of its effectiveness in contributing to a positive school climate. A greater understanding of teachers' perceptions of restorative practices on the specific elements of school climate may offer leaders and teachers within a district more clarity in determining whether restorative practices would be a benefit to their students and their schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of teachers who have been trained in restorative practices to determine the efficacy of RP in improving the school's climate. School climate is defined by the elements of school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships (National School Climate Center, 2017). As the purpose of this study is to analyze teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of RP in improving school

climate, the study may provide a clarifying perspective on the use of this disciplinary model.

### **Significance of the Study**

Because exclusionary discipline practices fail to reduce student misbehavior and lead to additional infractions and school dropout rates (American Psychological Association, 2008), educators have turned to behavior intervention options including restorative practices as a means to positively impact student behavior and the students' connectedness with school (Acosta et al., 2016). A study that focuses specifically on teacher perceptual awareness of RP's potential to improve school climate may provide clarity for students, teachers, and administrators as they consider the implementation of RP in their schools. The additional significance of this study lies in addressing gaps in the existing research of restorative practice models and implementations. While Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz (2016) reported better teacher-student relationships with the successful implementation of RP, the researchers recommended additional study regarding the effectiveness of RP implementation by teachers. Zulfa (2015) identified an apparent gap in the use of RP as a student discipline intervention and the absence of research to gauge the effectiveness of this practice

The potential impact in studying teacher perceptions of RP should not be overlooked as the results of this study may contribute valuable insight and theory into the successful implementation of an RP methodology in a school. Findings from this study could be of use to district leaders, school administrators, and teachers who are considering restorative practices as an alternative to their existing disciplinary policies within their districts and schools. Assessing teachers' attitudes towards RP can assist in

the development of a more positive school climate with clear school rules and norms, more supportive teaching practices, improved teacher social and civil knowledge, increased mutual respect among and between students and teachers, increased school connectedness, and improved leadership and professional relationships. The significance of the study exists in its potential to contribute an insight into classroom teachers' perceptions of a student disciplinary model that both modifies student behavior and contributes to a positive school climate.

### **Delimitations**

The following delimitations were identified: (a) the study was limited to a large, urban secondary high school in Kansas, and (b) respondents to the researcher's survey were trained in restorative practice strategies and had utilized these strategies as part of their classroom disciplinary procedures for at least one year.

### **Assumptions**

This study was based on the following assumptions: (a) the selected teachers embedded restorative practices within their classroom policies and procedures; (b) restorative practices were utilized at the administrative level in managing student misbehavior; (c) the selected teachers responded to the survey accurately and indicated their perceptions in the utilization of restorative practices in their school and in their classroom; (d) the survey administered to teachers is both valid and reliable in measuring teacher perceptions, feelings, and levels of comfort related to the use of restorative practices in a school; and (e) the interpretation of the data accurately represented the perceptions of the respondents.

## **Research Questions**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined research questions as those that focus the study's purpose. Further, these authors identified that the function of quantitative research questions is to "inquire about the relationships among variables that the investigator seeks to know" (p. 136). Quantitative research statements are often used in studies that include surveys (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research questions that focused this study were drawn from a review of the research on RP and from five of the elements of school climate as defined by the National School Climate Center (2017).

The following research questions directed the study:

**RQ1.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of (RP) improves school safety?

**RQ2.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves teaching and learning?

**RQ3.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves interpersonal relationships?

**RQ4.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the institutional environment?

**RQ5.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the leadership and professional relationships within the school?

## **Definition of Terms**

Following are terms used throughout the study. The definition of each term is provided to ensure clarity and to prevent misinterpretation.

**Elements of school climate.** School climate is the quality and character of life within a school constructed through the interrelated elements of school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships (NSCC, 2017).

**Safety.** Students and adults feel protected from physical harm, and students, specifically, will feel protected from teasing, verbal abuse, and exclusion by other students (NSCC, 2017).

**Teaching and learning.** This element includes support for both academic learning and social and civic learning. To improve student achievement, teachers use a variety of strategies that include providing students multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning, increasing access to rigor, supporting critical thinking, and offering productive feedback. To increase social and civic learning, teachers support the learning of a number of social-emotional capacities such as effective listening, conflict resolution, and empathy, as well as fostering the growth of social and civic knowledge (NSCC, 2017).

**Interpersonal relationships.** Students and adult stakeholders in a school develop relationships characterized by mutual respect and supportive patterns of adult behavior that demonstrate a concern for student success, individual differences, and problems (NSCC, 2017).

**Institutional environment.** NSCC (2017) defined institutional environment as the atmosphere that results from the expectations for stakeholders to connect and engage in



the school's academic programs, extracurricular activities, and social events that foster a school setting conducive to learning and working.

***Leadership and professional relationships.*** In a school with a positive school climate, educational leaders—building administrators—clearly define and communicate a vision for teaching and learning in addition to supporting teachers through staff development. School staff develop positive and supportive relationships essential to effective collaboration to address schoolwide concerns that often include student conduct and academic achievement (NSCC, 2017).

**Exclusionary discipline.** A response to growing fears of violence in schools (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014), exclusionary discipline employs suspensions and expulsions to remove an offending student from the learning environment either temporarily or permanently (Jones, et al., 2018).

**Restorative justice.** Often utilized in the criminal justice system, restorative justice (RJ) is an alternative response to non-violent criminal behavior that brings victims, offenders, and others together to resolve conflicts and repair relationships (Manassah, Roderick, & Gregory, 2018).

**Restorative practices.** Involving a variety of programs and strategies that use non-punitive means and an emphasis on relationship- and community-building, restorative practices (RP) can be used to address student behavior and conflict (Lustick, 2016). RP often includes the use of affective statements, restorative questions, proactive circles, and restorative conferences between school personnel and students (Augustine et al., 2018; Drewery & Kesckemeti, 2010).

## **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, background, and statement of the problem. Furthermore, the study's purpose and significance were described in Chapter 1 along with the study's underlying delimitations and assumptions. Concluding Chapter 1 were the research questions that drove the study, a definition of terms found within the study, and a brief overview of the study's methodology. Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature that includes a discussion of the origins, history, and theory of restorative justice and restorative practices, discipline practices in education, and teacher perceptions of restorative practices. The final components of the literature review include a discussion of the elements of school climate and the relationship between restorative practices and school climate. The study's methodology is identified in Chapter 3 including the research design, selection of the participants, and measurement components. Chapter 3 concludes with a description of the procedures to collect and analyze the data, the hypothesis testing, and the study's limitations. Results of the analysis—descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing—comprise Chapter 4. The study is summarized in Chapter 5 including the overview of the problem and a restatement of the study's purpose. Chapter 5 includes a review of the study's research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with the study's summary, major findings, connections to the literature, conclusions, implications for actions, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

This review of literature opens with a discussion of the origins, history, and theory of restorative justice that led to the development and use of restorative practices within schools and their classrooms. The literature review offers a description of the perceptions of teachers regarding RP and details the need for additional research of its use as an alternative to traditional responses to student misbehavior. The review concludes with a discussion of how the use of RP may impact a school's climate—specifically the elements of school climate defined by the NSCC.

#### **The Origins and History of Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice and its related practices do not comprise a new phenomenon. McFaul (2017) suggested that, in varying degrees, the use of restorative justice practices has a long history in human culture. Part of the history of restorative justice (RJ) can be drawn from the use of conferencing circles by the indigenous Maori tribe of New Zealand and their subsequent implementation as a behavior modification strategy in Australian schools in the early- to mid-1990s (Payne & Welch, 2015). Vaandering (2014) and Wachtel (2016) each noted numerous authors who traced restorative justice to ancient roots in cultures as varied as Native American, African, Hebrew, and Arabic. Wearmouth, Mckinney, and Glynn (2007) reported that the Maori tribe in New Zealand practiced the use of conferencing circles between the offender and the victim to help the victim realize how their actions impacted others. These restorative circles were then introduced into Australia's juvenile justice system and later adapted for use by the country's school systems (Biffis & Lockhart, 2008). Wachtel (2016) wrote of an early

example of a victim-offender reconciliation system that, in 1974, emerged after a probation officer arranged a successful mediation and subsequent restitution between two juvenile offenders and the victims of their vandalism spree. Throughout its ancient and contemporary history, the various forms of RJ have served to forge and develop the interpersonal connections between members of a community in the effort to recognize and sustain the well-being of its citizens (Vaandering, 2014).

In schools, the use of RJ turned toward educating students about their behavior to help address discipline issues (McFaul, 2017; Short, Case, & McKenzie, 2018). Guckenberg et al. (2015) acknowledged that RJ in the school setting is difficult to define but synthesized four features of RJ common among its use within an educational environment: (a) repairing harm over punishing the offender, (b) including the student perspective within the process of restitution, (c) implementing a whole-school approach to RJ, and (d) building students' social-emotional capacity through defined practices and strategies. Vaandering (2014) added that discussion of RJ in school-focused literature addressed the need for

address[ing] harm done, not rules broken, promot[ing] healthy, caring communication . . . fostering nurturing relationships and . . . facillitat[ing] 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)

The use of RJ in schools emerged in the 1990s to address a spectrum of student behaviors. School counselors and other support personnel utilized RJ to address student misbehavior or to repair broken student relationships (McCluskey et al., 2011). Morrison

and Vaandering (2012) and McCluskey et al. (2011) reported the use of RJ in schools to address serious behavior including assaults and other incidents that would result in criminal charges. Restorative justice has been applied both proactively and reactively in the implementation of anti-bullying strategies (Howard et al., 2011). Restorative justice can be reactive to student misbehavior and include the application of mediation, circle conferencing, and peace-making circles to resolve problems and conflict (Mayworm, et al., 2016; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

However, rather than only existing as a response to student misbehavior, RJ also has been defined both as a belief system and as a culture within a school (Alger, 2018). Guckenberger et al. (2015) identified the use of RJ throughout the school to include the teaching of strategies to build the social skills of students. Vaandering (2014) defined RJ as a “responsive framework” (p. 66) in which relationships between the school’s community members are developed, cultured, and repaired. In this manner, RJ, when implemented within a school, offers “the potential to be more prevention-oriented than punitive” (Fenning et al. 2012, p. 114). While there exists in schools more traditional and punitive disciplinary systems, the use of RJ addresses the development of relationships between members of the school community and manifests itself in the policies, pedagogy, curriculum, and development of the school (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Punitive disciplinary policies, dependent on power-based structures, focus on responding to the misbehavior of an individual student who exists within a hierarchical school framework of administrators, teachers, and students (Vaandering, 2014). Restorative justice, when thought of as a culture within a school, offers students the opportunity to rebuild the critical relationships with teachers and administrators in an atmosphere where the student

and their victim are equals and each is treated fairly (Mullet, 2014). Morrison summarized that the general approach within school policy and practice is for RJ to exist as a mechanism that is “more responsive and restorative to the needs and concerns of the school community” (as cited in Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 140).

### **Restorative Justice Theory**

Restorative justice often encapsulates a variety of terms cited by education practitioners that include restorative practices, restorative approaches, and restorative discipline (Guckenberger et al., 2015; Lustick, 2016). Each term draws from a philosophy of conflict resolution, i.e., restorative theory, in which the traditional criminal justice practices of Western civilization are often supplemented, and, in many cases, replaced by the development and maintenance of productive community relationships (Drewery, 2016). Lustick (2016) identified that within the traditional practices of criminal justice systems, a crime is viewed as an attack on the state and punishments are levied in accordance to the severity of the crime. Through the threat of punishments, citizens within a community are compelled to follow rules out of fear. Practitioners of restorative theory, however, view crimes not as the breaking of rules but as offenses against the community that can be resolved through conflict resolution practices derived from indigenous cultures around the world (Lustick, 2016) and through the practices similar to the mediation-reconciliation processes observed within Mennonite communities in Canada in the 1970s (Peachey, 1989). Zehr (2002) framed restorative justice theory with the idea that the consequences to a perpetrator of a crime should include an opportunity for that perpetrator to repair the harm done to individual relationships and the community.

While levers of rewards and punishment are motivating elements in traditional behavior control systems, restorative justice relies on relational interactions between the members of a community, or “relational ecologies” as defined by Morrison & Vaandering (2012, p. 140). Lustick (2016) advanced a principle of restorative theory that within a community, a citizen is compelled to follow the rules to protect not only themselves but also the others who, through their behavior, are protecting the individual. Restorative justice practices guide participants to producing positive social relationships that Drewery (2016) viewed as a tenet of social constructionist theory in which respectful social relationships are restored between those who have offended and those who have received offense. In this manner, restorative conferencing is utilized to heal crimes—both those who have offended and those who received offense share their view of what happened and how those events affected their well-being and the well-being of the community (Lustick, 2016). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) defined the collaborative nature of this conferencing as an opportunity for the offender and the victim to collectively determine a resolution to the problem. Three elements of RJ offered by Morrison and Vaandering (2012)—restitution, resolution, and reconciliation—are key components to repairing harm, reducing the reoccurrence of harm, and healing the frayed emotions that result from an offense being committed against a community.

Applied to a school community, RJ exists not as a process for the behavior modification of students, but as a culture and a belief system (Alger, 2018). Restorative justice as a culture can result in making school more inclusive than exclusive through the shared principle of respect that leads to mutual trust in resolving a conflict (Drewery, 2016). Short et al. (2018) emphasized that a culture of RJ allowed practitioners a chance

to focus on relationships within a school community and provided an opportunity for school personnel to educate students about their behavior. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) designated these “relational ecologies” (p. 140) that shifted educational practitioners from disciplinary practices of control to institutional, pedagogical practices of “engagement, development, and integrity” (p. 141) for the welfare of the student. Mullett (2014) concurred that a restorative approach in response to student misbehavior provided students the opportunity to repair relationships because the interventions fairly and equally supported the free communication between the victim and the offender. It is within this restorative culture that school personnel find opportunities within conflicts between students, teachers, and administrators to shift the school’s response from leveling punishments that result from a power struggle to a process of dialogue to solve problems, develop relationships, and strengthen the social-emotional capacity of a student (Lustick, 2016). A restorative approach to discipline supports the repair of the critical relationships between students, teacher, and administrators (Mullet, 2014), and restorative theory “is framed as an opportunity to rethink relationships, discipline, and the meaning of ‘punishment’” (Costello, Wachtel et al., 2010, p. 47).

### **Restorative Practices in Schools**

In response to growing student suspension rates and the disproportional application of exclusionary discipline to students of color, school leaders were challenged by both federal and state agencies to identify and implement alternative forms of discipline within their schools and to reduce schools’ reliance on suspensions in response to student misbehavior (Manassah et al., (2018). R. J. Skiba and Arrendondo et al.,



(2014) reported that since the 1970s, secondary school students have been increasingly suspended, a claim supported by research from Losen and Skiba (2010) who reported an increase in student suspensions and expulsions from 3.7% to 6.9% from the 1970s to the early 2000s. While White students experienced an increase of less than 2% in suspension rates between 1973 and 2006, Black students experienced a nine-point increase (Losen & Skiba, 2010). According to the Office of Civil Rights Data (2018), there were 3.45 million out-of-school suspensions in the 2015-16 school year.

Hinson (2020) reported that student suspensions have increased despite their lack of correlation to violent behavior. Guckenberg et al. (2015) summarized the views of multiple researchers and practitioners of restorative justice who confirmed the failure of exclusionary discipline approaches and the disparity in disciplinary actions among minority populations that fueled the school-to-prison phenomena. Jones et al. (2018) also noted the detrimental impact of suspension and expulsion on black males in addition to the negative impact on student achievement and the erosion of trust critical for school improvement and increased student performance. In a review of current research on restorative justice, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) cited researchers who determined that suspensions from school accounted for 20% of the achievement gap between White and Black students. McFaul (2017) wrote of the “notoriously retributive” (p. 83) administrative responses to student misbehavior by determining whom to blame and how severe a punishment to levy.

With their recommendation for more “proactive and creative” (p. 113) alternatives to addressing student misbehavior, Fenning et al. (2012), offered a review of school discipline policies that confirmed that few alternatives to suspension and

expulsion existed for school leaders to utilize. School leaders seeking to revise their disciplinary practices often worked in systems that relied heavily on punishments and consequences (McFaul, 2017). Traditional disciplinary practices remained the norm as suspension and expulsion were most identified within school policies as responses to managing student behavior. More proactive responses that included student skill-building were cited in fewer than five percent of school policy guidelines (Fenning et al., 2012). Further, both R. J. Skiba and Arrendondo et al. (2014) and Phillips (2018) agreed that exclusionary discipline practices offered no positive impact on school climate. Phillips (2018) also cited research that suspensions disrupted the learning environment and failed to prevent future student misbehavior.

Within a school, RP can involve a variety of programs and strategies that use non-punitive means to address student behavior and conflict (Fronius, Persson, Guckenbug, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016). The practices embedded into restorative disciplinary responses evolved from the principles of RJ used within the criminal justice system (Hunt, 2018; Mayworm et al., 2016). While Wachtel (2016) identified that practitioners of RJ emphasized repairing the harm done to a person or community by an offender rather than punishing the offender, RJ exists as a subset to RP—a series of strategies and behaviors that are preventative in nature and precede wrongdoing. The International Institute for Restorative Practices distinguished that RP are implemented within an organization to build and nurture interpersonal relationships as a primary prevention to wrongdoing (Wachtel, 2016). Manassah et al. (2018) emphasized that RP do not follow the traditional means of school discipline in which student offenders are assigned punitive measures in response to misbehavior. Rather, misbehavior is viewed as the

breach of a “relationship and trust” (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010, p. 4), and the use of RP involves relationship-building and collaborative problem solving—practices which require giving voice to both the victim and the offender (Augustine et al., 2018; Manassah, Roderick, & Gregory, 2018; Wachtel, 2016). Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) termed the relationship-building and problem-solving strategies within RP as “non-adversarial” (p. 102) responses to student behavior. Lustick (2016) confirmed that a system of RP is dependent on the existence of relationships and not on the protocols embedded into traditional disciplinary systems.

Central to these “proactive and creative” (Fenning et al., 2012) responses to student misbehavior that RP offer, is the initiation and nurturing of positive relationships between school personnel and students. While Crowe (2017) pointed toward all school relationships as the essential elements in affecting the problematic behaviors of students, he identified the necessity of positive student-teacher relationships in accomplishing this feat. Short et al. (2018) cited the student-teacher relationship as a “critical factor” (p. 320) to developing an effective school environment. Crowe (2017) confirmed that teachers themselves identified the necessity of relationship-building as a primary step in changing the problematic behavior of students. The teacher’s work in implementing interventions that students viewed as caring and supportive provided the most effective means to deter school violence (DiGuilio, 2000). These restorative interventions, with their focus on rebuilding relationships between teachers and students, more readily lead to the reintegration of students into the school community without the use of punitive discipline (Vaandering, 2014).

## **Restorative Practices in the Classroom**

At the classroom level, RP involves a number of “differentiated relational approaches to building and nurturing student behavior” (Curtis & Krenek, 2019, p. 8) with the success of RP dependent upon the use of these approaches in nurturing a positive relationship between students and teachers. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) defined a continuum of restorative practices (Appendix A) that ranged from informal strategies of teacher-driven affective statements and questions to more formal strategies of circle conferences that involve multiple participants (Wachtel, 2016). Both Harrison (2007) and Morrison (2007) defined similar RP continuums that included both informal and formal elements. Augustine et al. (2018) cited specific definitions for restorative practices from the SaferSanerSchools Whole School Change Program. The specific definitions of the informal and formal practices identified by the IIRP’s continuum (Augustine et al., 2018) and referred to by Harrison (2007), Morrison (2007), and Wachtel (2016) appear in Table 1.

The informal utilization of RP begins with affective statements and affective questions (Wachtel, 2016). Augustine et al. (2018) identified the IIRP’s definition of affective statements as the “personal expressions of feeling in response to specific or negative behaviors of others” (p. 26). When used preemptively by teachers, affective statements require students to share how they feel about a topic or situation (McCold & Wachtel, 2001). Curtis and Krenek (2019) cited the timely and strategic use of affective statements by teachers to make a student aware of either the positive or negative impact of their behavior on the teacher or on another student. Teachers can utilize affective statements using a variety of I statements that both target a student’s behavior and

Table 1

*Definitions of Restorative Practice Strategies from SaferSanerSchools™*

Strategy	Definition
Affective statements	Personal expressions of feeling in response to specific positive or negative behaviors of others.
Restorative questions	Questions selected or adapted from two sets of standard questions designed to challenge the negative behavior of the wrongdoer and to engage those who were harmed.
Small impromptu conferences	Questioning exercises that quickly resolve lower-level incidents involving two or more people.
Proactive circles	Meetings with participants seated in a circle, with no physical barriers, that provide opportunities for students to share feelings, ideas, and experiences in order to build trust, mutual understanding, shared values, and shared behaviors.
Responsive circles	Meetings with participants seated in a circle, with no physical barriers, that engage students in the management of conflict and tension by repairing harm and restoring relationships in response to a moderately serious incident or pattern of behavior affecting a group of students or an entire class.
Restorative conferences	Meetings in response to serious incidents or a cumulative pattern of less serious incidents where all of those involved in an incident (often including friends and family of all parties) come together with a trained facilitator who was not involved in the incident and who uses a structured protocol.

*Note.* Adapted from *Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district*, by C. H. Augustine, et al., (2018). Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2840.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2840.html).

personalize its impact on them or others: “I am feeling frustrated that your talking out of turn prevents others in the class from speaking,” and “I am upset that your arriving late to class requires me to start the lesson over” (Curtis & Krennek, 2019; Wachtel, 2016). Affective questions posed by teachers or facilitators require students to reflect upon their behavior and how it has affected others (Wachtel, 2016). These questions have the effect of addressing the offender’s negative behavior and engaging the victim of their offense (Augustine et al., 2018). Wachtel (2016) offered two examples of affective questions: ““Who do you think has been affected by what you just did?”” and ““How do you think they’ve been affected?”” (p. 9). The conversational nature generated by the use of affective statements, affective questions, and their subsequent student responses emphasize the respectful tone required for the effective use of informal RP (Harrion, 2007).

More formal elements of RP exist in the use of circles or groups that can function either proactively or reactively to student behavior. Circles, also referred to as groups, are used proactively by classroom teachers to develop both student-student and student-teacher relationships (Wachtel, 2016). In general, circles are used by teachers to encourage students to learn about each other and develop interrelational trust in a low-risk environment (Augustine et al., 2018). Teachers use these chats intentionally to develop bonds between students (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010) through conversational prompts that may include those identified in Appendix B. Kaveney and Drewery (2011) identified the use of more structured yet proactive classroom circle meetings in a New Zealand high school that emphasized the importance of students understanding how their body language communicated both conscious and unconscious messaging to other

students in the circle. Conversations within circles can be both freely structured with no order for who speaks, or they can be more formally managed by a sequential format described by Wachtel (2016) in which the order of those who speak moves unidirectionally around the circle. Most circle discussions are managed by a facilitator, often the teacher, who guides the conversation without imposing strict control of the topic (Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003).

A restorative circle conference, also known as a peace-circle (Zehr, 2002) can be used by RP practitioners to bring together offenders and victims, and often their respective family and friends, for a structured meeting to resolve differences between the parties (Augustine et al., 2018; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Wachtel, 2016).

Morrison (2007) identified the use of restorative conferencing to address a range of student behaviors from repetitive classroom disruptions to vandalism, fighting, and drug infractions. Participation in a restorative conference is voluntary—parties must agree to attend—and these conferences often replace more traditional and exclusionary discipline practices (O’Connell et al., 1999). A conference facilitator, using a script of questions for both the offender and the victim (see Appendix C), provides each participant in the circle an opportunity to describe their perspective of an incident and how it affected them (Wachtel, 2016). The restorative circle conference concludes when the victim and the offender agree to the victim’s desired outcome of the conference and each signs a contract (Morrison, 2003, O’Connell et al., Wachtel, 2016).

### **Teachers’ Perceptions of Restorative Practices**

Green (2006) wrote of the importance of understanding teacher perceptions of how student misbehavior and disciplinary practices impacted aspects of the school

climate. Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D'Allesandro (2013) echoed this claim in stating that “teacher perceptions of school climate were more sensitive to classroom level factors as ‘poor classroom management’ and proportion of students with disruptive behaviors” (p. 367). Teachers often favored zero-tolerance policies of suspension and exclusion because the perception existed that weak administrators allowed misbehavior to escalate by not properly enforcing discipline (Green, 2006). An important aspect of changing the at-risk behaviors of students lay in the perception by staff that positive relationships were beneficial to this cause, and as a result of that perception, staff would build systems across the school to promote stronger student-teacher relationships and strengthen student capacity to improve their social behavior (Crowe, 2017).

Teachers offered favorable perceptions of the use of RP in improving student-teacher relationships and fostering an increased understanding between students and teachers over a two-year implementation of classroom RP (Augustine et al., 2018). Alvis (2015) concluded that teachers generally recognized the positive aspects of RP, especially in strengthening student-teacher relationships and increasing the social-emotional skills of students. A qualitative study by Short et al. (2018) that utilized semi-structured interviews of five practitioners of a whole-school approach to RP within a secondary school in an impoverished community in England, revealed that teachers perceived that learning environments were both emotionally and physically safe.

Additional research by Hinson (2020) and Hunt (2018) revealed that while teachers recognized the usefulness of RP to repair relationships torn by student misbehavior, teachers reported that they could not specifically define RP or understand what RP was meant to accomplish through its implementation across a school. Hinson



(2020) deemed RP to be a “widely misunderstood” term by teachers (p. 125). Teachers in a randomized control study of 44 schools in Pittsburgh, PA, by Augustine et al. (2018) felt that RP had little impact on students who frequently misbehaved or suffered from mental health concerns. A common feeling existed among teachers that while the use of restorative circles and conferences could be effective in repairing relationships between students and between students and teachers, these practices were better suited to work in coordination with a school disciplinary plan than stand alone as a singular response to student misbehavior (Hinson, 2020). Furthermore, although teachers often acknowledged the potential benefits of RP, they also shared concerns about training in RP, staff buy-in, and implementation (Alvis, 2015).

Multiple studies identified that teachers held unfavorable perceptions on the ability of RP to address and reduce student misbehavior, especially among those who held rigid and authoritarian beliefs about school disciplinary practices (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012; Alger, 2018). Teachers felt that non-punitive responses to student misbehavior embedded in the ideology of RP were permissive (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012; Alger, 2018). Phillips (2018) cited the perceptions of teachers in both Chicago and New York as viewing restorative responses ineffective in correcting misbehavior, and, because of their use, being left to manage students who faced few consequences from administrators. Teachers were resistant to using RP due to the constraints of the time required to conference with a student or a class—formal and punitive responses were more efficient in responding to misbehavior by students, and teachers could move forward with instruction after sending a student to the office (Guckenburg et al., 2015). Less than 50% of teachers in a mixed-methods study of teacher agency in the

implementation of restorative justice by Hunt (2018) viewed the potential of RP as a favorable response to student misbehavior, and they cited numerous obstacles to the successful implementation of RP including a lack of accountability by students for their behavior, and a lack of communication, consistency, and support in the application of RP. McFaul (2017) also reported teacher perceptions of RP as ineffective in deterring student misbehavior but cautioned that “when a teacher has the opportunity to hear exactly how their referral is being handled differently, in a one-on-one setting, they often come away with an understanding that the restorative approach provides a more meaningful outcome” (p. 74). That teachers need to temper their expectations for an immediate and punitive response to student misbehavior by administrators is a reality of the application of restorative processes (Zulfa, 2015). The inherent challenges of a restorative program included overcoming the perceptions of its ineffectiveness as Guckenburg et al. (2015) identified the “difficult[y] for teachers . . . to see the long-term benefits associated with [RP] because of the time and dedication [for their implementation] required up front by the entire school community” (pp. 12-13).

### **A Need for Further Research of Restorative Practices**

Despite the general perceptions that RP provides beneficial alternatives to exclusionary discipline methods, researchers continue to question RP as a valid manner for addressing student misbehavior. Acosta et al. (2016) cited the need for additional evaluation of existing literature on RP. Mayworm et al. (2016) argued for continued research on the effectiveness of restorative practice compared to other disciplinary practices, especially in resolving the disproportionality in exclusionary consequences for Black and Hispanic students and students from impoverished backgrounds. Existing

research including that by Alvis (2015), Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010), Hamilton (2008), and Lustick (2016), is largely qualitative in nature as researchers utilized observations, case studies, and interviews from which to draw their results. Some of the research was conducted outside the United States, which raises additional questions as to the applicability of restorative disciplinary methods for students in U.S. schools (Mayworm et al., 2016). Past research has included studies on the implementation of school-wide RP systems, the impact of administrators, the use of specific RP strategies, and case studies of RP interventions with as few as one student (Mayworm et al., 2016). In addition, Mayworm et al. (2016) reported one large-scale, experimental study of the effectiveness of restorative practice between 2001 and 2013. The lack of any “rigorous” (Acosta et al., 2016, p. 413) evaluation of RP methods could create doubt not only among researchers but also among students, parents, teachers, and administrators as to the value of implementing RP policies and procedures in classrooms and in schools. Furthermore, Bebee (2015) identified the gaps in research that connected schoolwide behavior programs or supports as RP with teacher perceptions of school climate. A greater emphasis must be placed on understanding teacher perceptions of how student misbehavior and discipline practices impact aspects of the school climate (Green, 2006).

### **School Climate and Restorative Practices**

School climate results from the interrelated elements of school norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (NSCC, 2017). In their review of school climate research, Cohen et al. (2009) summarized that a positive school climate contributed to improved academic achievement, increased school success, the prevention of school violence, the retention of

teachers, and the healthy development of students. Further, the elements of a positive school climate supported the social, emotional, and physical well-being and safety of a school's community members (Cohen et al., 2009). In terms of student behavior, Thapa et al. (2013) determined that students in schools with a positive climate had better attendance and lower suspension rates while a lack of supportive norms, structures, and relationships within a school resulted in higher rates of absenteeism and student behavior referrals.

For this study, the researcher will define the relationship between the NSCC's (2017) specific elements of school climate—safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships—and the contributions of restorative practices to each.

**Safety.** R. Skiba and Simmons et al. (2004) noted the “deleterious” impact of “widespread incivility” (p. 9) on school climate, and Phillips (2018) added that recurring student misbehavior and its negative impact on teacher morale degrades the overall climate of a school. Green (2006) postulated that school climate is the first approach to preventing discipline problems and eliminating violence. In a school with a positive climate, both students and adults will feel safe from physical harm, and students, specifically, will feel protected from teasing, verbal abuse, and exclusion by other students (NSCC, 2017). School rules and norms in reference to a range of disruptive behaviors are clearly communicated and consistently enforced to insure the social, emotional, and physical safety of others (Cohen et al., 2009; NSCC, 2017). However, punitive disciplinary systems utilized to address student misbehavior through suspension and expulsion can result in students feeling less safe than schools with more restorative-

type processes (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). Alvis (2015) referenced multiple studies that identified a link between RP and the reduction in suspensions, property damage, and violent behavior. Morrison (2003) confirmed that restorative justice reduced violence in schools. Restorative practices used by teachers have contributed to reduced physical bullying (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Teachers in schools with restorative disciplinary practices perceived that school was safer as a result of their use and they perceived that students felt secure from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion (Alvis, 2015).

**Teaching & learning.** The NSCC (2017) defined two elements of teaching and learning that contributed to a positive school climate—support for learning and social and civic learning. In the former, a range of strategies designed to increase student achievement included providing students multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning, increasing access to rigor, supporting critical thinking, and offering productive feedback. In the latter, teachers would support the learning of a number of social-emotional capacities such as effective listening, conflict resolution, empathy, as well as the growth of social and civic knowledge (NSCC, 2017).

The research is limited and inconclusive in connecting the use of RP to increased student academic achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In a study of schools that utilized a restorative program, Pursuing Equitable and Restorative Communities (PERC), Augustine et al. (2018) did not observe improved academic success in math and reading scores across the 44 schools that participated in the program. Similar results were reported by Norris (2009) who found that participants in RJ did not realize significant gains in grade-point averages. Mullett (2014) noted that RP models did

contribute to improved academic achievement. In Oakland, CA, data from schools that implemented RJ indicated increased reading levels and graduation over the non-RJ schools in the district (Jain et al., 2014). Restorative conferencing was connected to slight improvements in participants' grade-point averages in a study by McMorris et al. (2013) of at-risk students in the Minneapolis, MN, school district. In a study by Armour (2014), students of color, students in special education programs, and students from impoverished backgrounds all realized academic gains in reading and mathematics. Mullett (2014) noted that RP models did contribute to improved academic achievement. The improvements identified in these studies, however, were linked to the specific utilization of restorative strategies and not to the instructional strategies emphasized by the NSCC (2017) that contribute to a positive school climate. In their review of current research in restorative programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) summarized that the use of RJ "can coincide with high academic performance rather than it can improve academic performance" (p. 304).

While the research is limited in drawing a direct link between the use of RP and increased student academic achievement, Silverman and Mee (2018) reported that RP increased opportunities for students to develop social-emotional skills, which, in turn, showed a propensity for strengthening school climate (Johnson & Stevens, 2006). Advocates of RP like Tyler (2006) and Zehr (2002) proposed that, unlike exclusionary discipline practices that only manage student behavior, RP forms and strengthens students' abilities critical to managing emotions and navigating conflict. The embedded features of RP, both formal and informal, offered students access to critical coping and regulatory mechanisms and conflict-resolution skills to help students manage

their anger and frustration (Crowe, 2017; Green, 2006). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) described that after the use of RP, students demonstrated improved problem-solving skills which suggested an improved ability to manage student-to-student and student-to-teacher conflict. Hinson (2020), in a study of stakeholder perspectives of the implementation of RP, offered that affective statements and restorative questions supported more students in reflecting on and feeling less defensive about their behavior. Further, both Alvis (2015) and Morrison and Vaandering (2012) identified that RP increased student understanding and empathy toward others.

**Interpersonal relationships.** Productive adult-student, adult-adult, and student-student relationships comprise an element of school climate that is supported through RP. The NSCC (2017) defined the element of Interpersonal Relationships as being characterized by mutual respect between the student and adult stakeholders in a school as well as supportive patterns of adult behavior that demonstrate a concern for student success, individual differences, and problems. In a positive school climate, students engage in supportive relationships towards each other not only for socializing, but also to support problem-solving and to offer academic support (NSCC, 2017). Jones et al. (2018) revealed an expressed need by students for teachers to understand them better and to show greater levels of listening and caring toward them. This improved alignment between teachers and students, according to Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010), is required for effective teaching to occur. The use of RP increased the awareness of more supportive and caring relationships for students by teachers (Augustine et al., 2018; Kaveny & Drewery, 2011), and students reported an increased level of support and concern by teachers (Hinson, 2020). Between students, exposure to RP led to increased

levels of respect (Grossi & dos Santos, 2012), increased empathy and engagement (Hinson, 2020), and improved problem-solving skills that suggested a growing capacity of students to manage peer-to-peer conflicts as well as student-to-teacher conflicts (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Restorative circles, particularly, increased a student sense of community within a school (Manassah et al., 2015). Altogether, teachers perceived more connections between school stakeholders, especially between teacher and students as a result of RP (Alvis, 2015; Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016).

**Institutional environment.** Schools with a positive climate foster the expectation for stakeholders to connect and engage in their academic programs, extracurricular activities, and social events as well as foster an environment conducive to learning and working (NSCC, 2017). This idea of school connectedness is linked to student health and achievement, violence prevention, and improved student conduct (Thapa et al., 2013). Loukas (2007) identified a number of mechanisms to increase students' sense of school connectedness that included "conflict-resolution programs . . . treating students with care, fairness, and consistency . . . [and] promoting student decision-making skills, individual and civic responsibility, and commitment to the larger school community" (p. 3). Research is limited on the link between the use of RP and increased stakeholder participation in school-life activities, but research supports students' feelings of school connectedness through the use of RP. Darling-Hammond et al. (2018) cited improved attendance and reduced tardiness in studies of school with RP programs. The use of family conferencing contributed to greater feelings of school connectedness in a study by McMorris et al. (2013). Singer (2018) offered an anecdotal example of the use of restorative conferencing in strengthening school connections among students that reduced



their tendencies to commit hostile or violent behaviors. Through the use of the PERC program in Pittsburg, PA, schools, teachers reported better working conditions at their school (Augustine et al., 2018).

**Leadership and professional relationships within the school.** The NSCC's final element of school climate—termed Staff Only—includes the dimensions of leadership and professional relationships (NSCC, 2017). In a school with a positive school climate, educational leaders, generally building administrators, are tasked with defining and communicating a clear vision for teaching and learning and providing support to teachers and staff members through staff development (NSCC, 2017). Among school staff, positive and supportive relationships are essential for effective collaboration to address a variety of concerns including student conduct and academic achievement (NSCC, 2017).

Considering school climate only, the research is unambiguous about the need for effective leadership that can communicate school goals, set clear expectations for staff, and model the desired behaviors that produce an effective and supportive teaching and learning environment (Augustine et al., 2018; Bebee, 2015; Green, 2006). Both Green (2006), and Phillips (2018) cited studies that connected school climate and high student achievement to the effectiveness of its leadership. In the effort to create positive climates in their schools, effective leaders work constantly to identify new strategies to support that outcome (Barkley, Lee, & Eadens, 2014).

Because negative student behavior can be detrimental to the climate of a school, many school leaders may turn to RP as a mechanism to effect positive changes (Augustine et al., 2018). Improving student behavior through the use of RP is predicated

upon effective leadership in its implementation within a school (Guckenberg et al., 2015). Furthermore, Hinson (2020) identified the need for invested administration in implementing RP and resources put to use to train teachers. Both Crowe (2017) and Guckenberg et al. (2015) confirmed that a whole-school implementation and commitment to RP was dependent not only upon strong administrators but also on strong teacher leaders. When inconsistencies and misalignment between administrators and teachers occurred in the application of RP, implementation and sustainability of the practices suffered (Alger, 2018).

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 provided a review of the research relevant to the questions of this research project. The chapter opened with a discussion of the origins and history of restorative justice from which RP, used in schools through both informal and formal means, were developed. Chapter 2 continued with a review of the literature that identified teachers' perceptions of the use of RP in schools. The concluding section of Chapter 2 offered a review of the relationship between RP and five elements of school climate that included safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships. Chapter 3 describes the methodology utilized for this research study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to measure teachers' perceptions of the impact of RP on school climate within a school whose administration and teachers utilize RP as an alternative to suspension and expulsion. These phenomena were investigated through the use of the survey, *The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of Teacher Perceptions* (Appendix D) which was administered to teachers employed at an urban secondary school recognized for its work in restorative practice.

The contents of this chapter include an explanation of the research design, participant selection, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis and hypothesis testing of the study. The chapter also includes a description of the development of the online internet survey study designed to collect responses from participants.

#### **Research Design**

Cozby (2001) defined a quantitative study as one in which data is collected and statistically analyzed. Considering the nature of this study, a quantitative research design proved most useful in addressing the research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) maintained that survey design allows researchers to examine relationships between variables to answer research questions and hypotheses. In addition, survey design quantifies "trends, attitudes, and opinions" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147). of a sample from a population or examines associations between the variables within a sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher selected a cross-sectional survey method for the study. The survey design was selected for its ease-of-use by respondents and its

efficiency in returning data. The survey was administered electronically through a Google Form. The 12-item survey was utilized to measure the perceptions of teachers that school climate was improved by the schoolwide use of RP

The variables of interest in this research were the teachers' perceptions of the use of RP to improve school climate as defined by the NSCC's dimensions of climate. Those variables of interest included teachers' perceptions of the use of RP to improve school safety and to improve teaching and learning. Additional variables of interest included teachers' perceptions of the use of RP to improve interpersonal relationships, to improve the institutional environment, and to improve leadership and professional relationships within the school.

### **Selection of Participants**

A purposive sampling technique, specifically, homogenous sampling, was selected for this study. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to deliberately identify participants based on the qualities they possess (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Homogenous sampling is a more specific form of purposive sampling in which participants share a particular similarity (Etika et al., 2016). For this study, the participants were selected for their knowledge, training, and use of RP across a secondary school. Participants for this study included 98 teachers from an urban school district in Kansas who served one year or more as a teacher at the secondary level in a school recognized for its work in restorative practice, and, who received professional development training in restorative practice strategies including affective statements and restorative circles.

## Measurement

The NSCC (2017) recognized six elements of school climate, and within those six elements, identified 13 dimensions (see Appendix E). A 12-item survey for this study was derived from five of the six elements of school climate and their representative dimensions. Due to the complex nature of the sixth element, social media, the researcher did not consider it for the purposes of this study. Furthermore, the dimension of physical surroundings within the element of institutional environment was not considered for the study's purpose.

In this study's survey, items 1-3 were designed to measure teachers' perceptions on the effect of RP on the element of school safety and its dimensions of rules and norms, physical security, and social-emotional security. Items 4-5 measured teachers' perceptions of RP on the element of teaching and learning comprised of the dimensions of support for academic learning and social and civic learning. Items 6-8 measured teachers' perceptions of RP on the element of interpersonal relationships. These items referenced the dimensions of respect for diversity, social support of adults, and social support of students. Item 9 measured teachers' perceptions of RP on the institutional environment with its specific dimension of school connectedness. Items 10-12 measured teachers' perceptions of RP on the dimensions of leadership and professional relationships—organized by the NSCC under the element identified as Staff Only. Each item utilized a four-point Likert scale for response options: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*. A neutral response was not used as Dolnicar and Grun (2013) cited the difficulty that Likert rating midpoints created in interpreting survey responses.

Creswell (2002) defined content validity as the “extent to which the questions on the instrument and the scores from these questions are representative of all the possible questions that could be asked about the content or skills (p. 184). Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) identified the need for survey items to assess what they were intended to assess.

School leaders provided assistance for establishing the validity of the survey items. The survey, in draft form, was reviewed by three administrators with knowledge of both RP and school climate. Feedback from the respondents was intended to modify the survey, but no modifications to the survey were made. Because a scale was not developed from the survey items, a reliability analysis was not required. Sackett and Larson (1990) stipulated:

Most commonly used single-item measures can be divided into two categories: (a) those measuring self-reported facts . . . and (b) those measuring psychological constructs, e.g., aspects of personality . . . measuring the former with single items is common practice. However, using a single-item measure for the latter is considered to be a “fatal error” in research. If the construct being measured is sufficiently narrow or is unambiguous to the respondent, a single item may suffice. (p. 631)

The individual survey items utilized for this study were self-reported facts that were appropriately limited and clear. Consequently, this survey instrument’s reliability was deemed sufficient for the measurement.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Prior to administering the survey, the researcher submitted a proposal for research to the Baker Institutional Review Board (IRB) on January 14, 2021. The board granted approval on January 25, 2021 (see Appendix F). The researcher contacted the executive director of assessment and research from the participating school district for information on how to conduct a research study within a district high school. At the request of the executive director, the researcher submitted a proposal for research and a request to conduct research application. The Baker University-approved IRB and the research survey were submitted along with the application to conduct research (see Appendix G).

On February 1, 2021, the school district's research review committee notified the researcher of approval to conduct the study. The school principal was notified of the approval to conduct the research at the school site. Teacher contact information was gathered through the school's teacher directory. An invitation to complete the research survey was emailed to teachers who met participant requirements. A Google Form was used to collect data for the survey. The survey provided all prospective participants with a written description and purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and a consent form identifying them of the protection of their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity if they participated in the study. The study's survey, *The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of Teacher Perceptions*, its invitation, and consent to participate are included in Appendix D. Invitations to participate were written to be both concise and inviting. An estimate of the time the survey would take to complete was included. A week after the initial invitation to participate was offered, the researcher sent a reminder email to prospective participants and a second electronic copy of the survey (Appendix I).

Two weeks after sending the initial invitation to participate, the researcher sent a final invitation to prospective teacher participants (Appendix I). The Google Form survey data were linked to a spreadsheet and uploaded to the IBM SPSS software for the calculation of descriptive statistics and the hypothesis testing.

### **Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing**

According to Roberts (2010), when describing the methodology for a quantitative study, the student must include a report of each of the descriptive or inferential statistics, how it was used, and the level of statistical significance used for hypothesis testing. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) argued that this section is critical to the successful replication of a study. Following are the five research questions that organized the study, the hypotheses that address each research question, and the analysis used to test the hypothesis. The one-sample  $t$  test was chosen for the hypothesis testing because it involves the comparison of one group mean with a known value, and the group mean is a numerical variable.

**RQ1.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves school safety?

**H1.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is improved communication of the school rules and norms regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing.

**H2.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm in the school.

**H3.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students that they feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.



Three one-sample *t*-tests were conducted to test H1-H3, with the variable being teachers' perception levels of RP improving school safety. Each sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's *d*, is reported.

**RQ2.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves teaching and learning?

**H4.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the use of supportive teaching practices has increased among teachers.

**H5.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions has increased among teachers.

Two one-sample *t* tests were conducted to test H4-H5, with the variable being teachers' perception levels of RP improving teaching and learning. Each sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's *d*, is reported.

**RQ3.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves interpersonal relationships?

**H6.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student, adult-student, adult-adult, and overall norms for tolerance.

**H7.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students.

**H8.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive peer relationships for students.

Three one-sample *t* tests were conducted to test H6-H8, with the variable being teachers' perceptions levels of RP improving interpersonal relationships. Each sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's *d*, is reported.

**RQ4.** To what extent do teachers perceive the use of RP improves the institutional environment?

**H9.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of school connectedness.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H9 with the variable being teachers' perception level of the use of RP to improve the institutional environment. The sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's *d*, is reported.

**RQ5.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the leadership and professional relationships within the school?

**H10.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the effectiveness of the administration in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school.

**H11.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development.

**H12.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.

Three one-sample *t* tests were conducted to test H10-H12 with the variable being teachers' perceptions in the use of RP to improve the leadership and professional relationships within the school. Each sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's *d*, is reported.

### **Limitations**

This study contained the following limitations:

1. Participation in the study was voluntary. As a result, responses from the school's participating respondents may not entirely represent the perceptions of the school's teachers as a whole.
2. Because some teachers may have had only one year of professional training and implementation of RP, the study may not have captured the full impact of RP implementation within the teachers' classrooms and within the school.
3. The research was specific to teachers and administrators from one urban high school in Kansas, and, therefore, may not be generalizable to other high schools that utilized RP as a disciplinary strategy.
4. The research was conducted during a period of remote instruction by teachers in which students were not physically present in schools. As a result, responses to the participants may not be entirely representative of the responses they may

provide when students are in school and the use of RP is more frequent and immediate.

### **Summary**

This chapter restated the study's purpose to determine teachers' perceptions of the use of RP to improve school climate. A quantitative research design was utilized for the study. The researcher presented five research questions and their respective hypotheses were proposed. Participants of the study were teachers from an urban high school known for the use of RP by teachers and administrators across the school. The researcher developed a 12-item survey to assess the variables in the five research questions. A Google Form was used to collect responses to the survey items. Data from the participants' responses was analyzed through the use of one-sample *t* tests. In Chapter 4 the researcher will summarize the descriptive data gathered from the survey and summarize the results of the hypothesis testing.

## Chapter 4

### Results

This quantitative study was designed to evaluate the perceptions of teachers on the impact of restorative practices on school climate. This chapter presents the data collected from the 12-item survey, *The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of Teacher Perceptions*. A one-sample  $t$  test was utilized to test each of the research hypotheses. The contents of this chapter include a descriptive analysis for each survey item and the results of the hypotheses testing. Each of the research hypotheses was tested using a one-sample  $t$  test to compare the mean responses in the survey regarding the teachers' perceptions of the impact of restorative practices on school climate.

#### Descriptive Statistics

The target population for this study was 98 teachers from a large, urban school district recognized for its use of school-wide restorative practices to address student behavior. The sample consisted of 24 teachers who returned completed surveys. The statistical program IBM® SPSS® Statistics Faculty Pack 27 for Windows was used to analyze the study data. Each of the variables specified in the survey items was measured using a Likert scale:  $1 = strongly disagree$ ,  $2 = disagree$ ,  $3 = agree$ ,  $4 = strongly agree$ .

In responding to the survey, 65.2% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *The communication of the rules and norms regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing has improved as a result of the use of restorative practices*. 34.8% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q1*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	8	34.8
Agree or Strongly Agree	15	65.2
Total	23	

In responding to the survey, 66.7% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *The sense among students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm in the school has increased as a result of the use of restorative practices*. 33.3% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 3

Table 3

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q2*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	8	33.3
Agree or Strongly Agree	16	66.7
Total	24	

In responding to the survey, 66.7 of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, teachers believe that there is an increased sense among students that they feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion*. 33.3% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q3*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	8	33.3
Agree or Strongly Agree	16	66.7
Total	24	

In responding to the survey, 66.7% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, the use of supportive teaching practices has increased among teachers*. 33.3% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 5.

Table 5

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q4*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	8	33.3
Agree or Strongly Agree	16	66.7
Total	24	

In responding to the survey, 62.5% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, the support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions has increased among teachers*. 37.5% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 6

Table 6

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q5*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	9	37.5
Agree or Strongly Agree	15	62.5
Total	24	

In responding to the survey, 70.8% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student, adult-student, adult-adult—and overall norms for tolerance.* 29.2% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q6*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	7	29.2
Agree or Strongly Agree	17	70.8
Total	24	

In responding to the survey, 70.8% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students.* 29.2% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 8.



Table 8

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q7*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	7	29.2
Agree or Strongly Agree	17	70.8
Total	24	

In responding to the survey, 69.6% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive peer relationships for students*. 30.4% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 9.

Table 9

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q8*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	7	30.4
Agree or Strongly Agree	16	69.6
Total	23	

In responding to the survey, 54.5% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of school connectedness*. 45.5% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 10.

Table 10

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q9*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	10	44.5
Agree or Strongly Agree	12	54.5
Total	22	

In responding to the survey, 56.5% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of the effectiveness of the administration in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school.* 43.5 of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 11.

Table 11

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q10*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	10	43.5
Agree or Strongly Agree	13	56.5
Total	23	

In responding to the survey, 58.3% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development.* 41.7% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 12.

Table 12

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q11*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	10	41.7
Agree or Strongly Agree	14	58.3
Total	24	

In responding to the survey, 69.6% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the item *As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of the positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together*. 30.4% of respondents indicated disagreement. Results are reported in Table 13.

Table 13

*Frequencies and Percentages for Q12*

Agreement Category	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	7	30.4
Agree or Strongly Agree	16	69.6
Total	23	

**Hypothesis Testing**

One-sample *t* tests were utilized to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of restorative practices on the elements of school climate: school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships. The analysis focused on five research questions. The subsequent order of this section is the presentation of each research question, an analysis

paragraph, each hypothesis for the research question, and the results of the hypothesis test.

**RQ1.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves school safety?

Three one-sample *t*-tests were conducted to test H1-H3, with the variable being teachers' perception levels of RP improving school safety. Each sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's *d*, is reported.

**H1.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is improved communication of the school rules and norms regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing.

The results of the one sample *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(22) = 5.007, p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.044$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.61, SD = 0.58$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H1 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is improved communication of the school rules and norms regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**H2.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm in the school.

The results of the one sample *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(23) = 5.127, p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.047$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.67, SD = 0.64$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H2 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased

sense among students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm in the school. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**H3.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students that they feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(23) = 4.371$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.892$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H3 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students that they feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**RQ2.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves teaching and learning?

Two one-sample  $t$  tests were conducted to test H4-H5, with the variable being teachers' perception levels of RP improving teaching and learning. The sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's  $d$ , is reported.

**H4.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the use of supportive teaching practices has increased among teachers.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(23) = 5.027$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.026$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H4 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP the use of supportive teaching practices has increased among teachers. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**H5.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions has increased among teachers.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(23) = 4.033$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.823$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H5 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP the support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions has increased among teachers. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**RQ3.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves interpersonal relationships?

Three one-sample  $t$  tests were conducted to test H6-H8, with the variable being teachers' perceptions levels of RP improving interpersonal relationships. The sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's  $d$ , is reported.

**H6.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of mutual respect for individual differences (e.g., gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student, adult-student, adult-adult, and overall norms for tolerance.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(23) = 5.438$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.110$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H6 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased

sense of mutual respect for individual differences at all levels of the school—student-student, adult-student, adult-adult, and overall norms for tolerance. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**H7.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(23) = 4.703$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.960$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H7 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**H8.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive peer relationships for students.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(22) = 5.147$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.073$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H8 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive peer relationships for students. The effect size indicated a large effect.

**RQ4.** To what extent do teachers perceive the use of RP improves the institutional environment?

A one-sample  $t$  test was conducted to test H9 with the variable being teachers' perception level of the use of RP to improve the institutional environment. The sample

mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's  $d$ , is reported.

**H9.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of school connectedness.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(21) = 2.614$ ,  $p = .016$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.557$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H9 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of school connectedness. The effect size indicated a medium effect.

**RQ5.** To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the leadership and professional relationships within the school?

Three one-sample  $t$  tests were conducted to test H10-H12 with the variable being teachers' perceptions in the use of RP to improve the leadership and professional relationships within the school. The sample mean was compared to a test value of 2.0. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, the effect size, as indexed by Cohen's  $d$ , is reported.

**H10.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the effectiveness of the administration in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(22) = 3.441$ ,  $p = .002$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.718$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H10 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased



sense of the effectiveness of the administration in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school. The effect size indicated a medium effect.

**H11.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(23) = 3.685$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.752$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H11 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development. The effect size indicated a medium effect.

**H12.** Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.

The results of the one sample  $t$  test indicated a statistically significant difference between the group mean and the test value,  $t(22) = 4.362$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.910$ . The sample mean ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) was significantly higher than the test value (2.0). H12 was supported. Teachers agree that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together. The effect size indicated a large effect.

## **Summary**

Chapter 4 contained the descriptive statistics for each survey item and the  $t$  test results for each hypothesis. The results of each test indicated that teachers demonstrated agreement that the use of restorative practices improved the school climate relative to its

elements of school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships. In Chapter 5, the researcher summarizes the study and presents the major findings. Further, the researcher draws connections between the findings of the study and the research literature, identifies the implications for action, makes recommendations for future research, and presents concluding remarks.

## Chapter 5

### Interpretation and Recommendations

This study examined the perceptions of teachers on the impact of the use of RP on school climate. The study's results make a contribution to clarifying the effectiveness of the use of RP in improving school climate as students, teachers, and administrators consider the implementation of RP in their schools. The results of the study also contribute to the understanding of how the use of RP improves teacher-student relationships. Moreover, the study's results provide insights about teachers' attitudes regarding the use of RP and its impact on school safety, teaching and learning, school environment, and relationships between the members of a school's community. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study that includes the summary of the results, the results compared with the literature, implications for action, recommendations for research, and concluding remarks.

#### Study Summary

In the following section, the researcher provides an overview of the problem, restates the study's purpose and research questions, and reviews the study's methodology. The researcher then offers the study's major findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

**Overview of the problem.** Faced with increasing rates of student suspension and expulsion that disproportionately affect students of color, school administrators search for alternative strategies to respond to student misbehavior rather than rely on traditional and exclusionary discipline practices (Arcia, 2006; Golson, 2018; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). Research reveals that exclusionary discipline practices work against the outcomes

of reducing negative student behaviors and increasing student achievement (American Psychological Association, 2008; Jones et al., 2018). Further, the use of suspensions and expulsions erodes the trust and relationships between a school's adults and its students, that, in turn, negatively impact the school's community and its climate (Golson, 2018; Jones et al., 2018). A lack of research exists on teachers' understandings of the impact of the use of RP on school climate (Alvis, 2015; Bebee, 2015). Further, Lustick (2016) identified conflicting reports of teacher satisfaction with the use of RP.

**Purpose statement and research questions.** The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the impact of RP on school climate within a school whose administration and teachers utilize RP as an alternative to suspension and expulsion. The study's research questions were organized around the school climate elements of school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships as defined by the National School Climate Center (2017). To investigate teachers' perceptions of the impact of RP on school climate, the following research questions were utilized: (a) To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves school safety? (b) To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves teaching and learning? (c) To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves interpersonal relationships? (d) To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the institutional environment? and (e), To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the leadership and professional relationships within the school?

**Review of the methodology.** The researcher used a quantitative research survey design to collect data about the perceptions of teachers on the impact of RP on school

climate. The quantitative, cross-sectional survey was selected for its accessibility by participants and for its efficiency in returning data. The online survey was distributed to participants by email. The study's population of interest was teachers who worked in an urban secondary school in which RP strategies were embedded schoolwide and utilized by both teachers and administrators. The population sample was 98 teachers. Twenty-four teachers responded to the survey.

**Major findings.** In this section, the findings of this quantitative study are aligned in regard to the research questions and their respective hypotheses. The extent to which teachers perceive that the use of RP improves school safety was addressed by three hypotheses: (a) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is improved communication of the school rules and norms regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing; (b) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm in the school; and (c) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students that they feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion. The study's participants indicated that they agree that the use of RP improved communication of the school rules and norms regarding safety, that there was an increased sense of safety from physical harm, and that there was an increased sense of safety from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion. The results of this study suggest that teachers perceive that the use of RP increases school safety for both adults and students.

The extent to which teachers perceive that the use of RP improves teaching and learning was investigated using two hypotheses: (a) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the use of supportive teaching practices has increased among teachers; and

(b) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions has increased among teachers.

Participants indicated that they agree that the use of RP increased the use of supportive teaching practices and provided support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The results of the study suggest that teachers perceive that the use of RP improves teaching and learning.

The third research question in the study examined the extent to which teachers perceive that the use of RP improves interpersonal relationships. This research question was investigated by three hypotheses: (a) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of mutual respect for individual differences at all levels of the school—student-to-student, adult-student, adult-adult, and overall norms for tolerance; (b) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students; and (c) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive peer relationships for students. The study's participants agree that the use of RP increased the sense of mutual respect and tolerance for and amongst students and teachers. Further, participants agree that the use of RP increased supportive adult relationships for students, and increased supportive relationships between students. The results of the study suggest that teachers perceive that the use of RP improves interpersonal relationships for both students and adults within the school.

The extent to which teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the institutional environment was investigated using one hypothesis: Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of school connectedness. The study's

participants agree that the use of RP increased school connectedness. The results of the study suggest that teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the institutional (school's) environment.

The fifth research question in the study examined the extent to which teachers perceive that the use of RP improves the leaderships and professional relationships within the school. Three hypotheses were used to investigate this question: (a) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the effectiveness of the administration in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school; (b) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development; and (c) Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working together. Participants agree that the use of RP increased the effectiveness of the administration, increased the accessibility and support of administration for professional development, and increased the sense of positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that supported effective work. The results of the study suggest that teachers perceive that the use of RP improves leadership and professional relationships.

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

In this section, the researcher examines the study's findings as they relate to existing literature on the use of RP to impact school climate. Specifically, the study's findings are discussed relative to the literature that examines the capacity to improve school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, the institutional environment, and leaderships and professional relationships through the use of RP.

**Restorative practices' impact on school safety.** R. Skiba and Simmons et al. (2004) identified the negative impact of uncivil student behavior on school climate, a conclusion supported by Phillips (2018) who added that student misbehavior degraded the overall climate of a school. Green (2006) argued that a positive school climate is the initial approach to curbing discipline problems and reducing school violence. This study's participants agree or strongly agree that the use of RP improves school safety. This result aligns with the conclusions in a study by Alvis (2015) in which teachers agreed that the use of RP both improves student behavior and increases school safety. Teachers in this study indicated that the use of RP improves the communication of the rules and norms of a school regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing. These results support the conclusion by Cohen et al. (2009) that clearly communicated rules in reference to a variety of disruptive behaviors are required to insure the social, emotional, and physical safety of others. Teachers in the study also verified that the use of RP increases the sense among both students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm, a conclusion echoed by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) in their review of quantitative research of practices in restorative justice. Additionally, this result supports the conclusions of McNeely, et al. (2002) that schools with RP-type processes improve the sense of safety among students as compared to students in schools with punitive disciplinary systems. Furthermore, the current study's results confirm the findings of Alvis (2015) that teachers believe that students feel an increased sense of safety from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion as a result of the use of RP.

**Restorative practices' impact on teaching and learning.** In their review of current research on the use of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools,



Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) noted that the impact on academic achievement is “thoroughly mixed” (p. 305). Results from a study on the use of restorative communities in 44 K-12 schools in Pittsburgh, PA, by Augustine et al. (2018) did not identify student gains in math and reading achievement. Data from studies by Armour (2014), McMorris et al. (2013), and Mullett (2014) indicated some gains in reading, mathematics, and grade-point-averages that were linked to the use of RP strategies and not instructional strategies. This study’s purpose in measuring teachers’ perceptions about the use of RP to impact teaching and learning focused on the use of effective teaching strategies. In responding to the survey, teachers agree or strongly agree that the use of RP increases the use of teaching practices that include strategies that provide students effective feedback and support them in thinking independently, participating in academic dialogue, and taking on academic challenges. These teaching practices may be evidence of a coincidental relationship between the use of RP and improved academic outcomes as Kerstetter (2016) determined in a study of the use of restorative justice in urban charter schools.

The use of RP to increase the social-emotional skills of students is more clearly identified in the research. Teachers in this study agree that the use of RP increases the support for the development of students’ social and emotional acumen. Building students’ capacity to demonstrate behaviors associated with social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions can be a route for schools to improve school climate, as Silverman and Mee (2018) reported from their descriptive study of the use of community circles in middle-school classrooms. Both Crowe (2017) and Green (2006) offered evidence that supported the idea that the formal and informal features of RP increased student access to

skills necessary for managing anger and frustration. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) identified improved aptitudes among students for managing conflicts with each other and with their teachers. Responses to the survey in this study confirm the conclusions in these studies that the use of RP can support the development of students' social and civic knowledge and skills.

**Restorative practices' impact on interpersonal relationships.** In responding to the survey, teachers agree or strongly agree that the use of RP contributed to the school climate through its impact on the adult-student, adult-adult, and student-student relationships. Hinson (2020) cited the potential for RP to "create awareness and develop relationships amongst staff [and] students" (p. 119) especially for students in urban schools. Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) asserted that effective teaching is dependent on a positive alignment between teachers and students. In this study, teachers agree or strongly agree that the use of RP increased the sense of mutual respect for individual differences and overall norms for tolerance. Further, the survey results indicate that teachers agree that the use of RP increased their sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students. These results support a study of schools in Oakland, CA, by Jain et al. (2014) in which school staff members reported an increase in caring relationships between teachers and students through the use of a whole-school restorative justice program. Responses to the survey also confirm the results of a study of Pittsburgh, PA, K-12 schools by Augustine et al. (2018) in which a whole-school approach to restorative communities was used. The survey results for the current study suggest that teachers identify more connections between teachers and students through the use of RP strategies. These results align with the perceptions of teachers in studies by

Alvis (2015) and Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016). Furthermore, teachers in the study agree and strongly agree that the use of RP increased their sense of students' supportive relationships for each other. Hinson (2020) identified increased student empathy and engagement and improved relationships with their peers through the use of proactive circles in urban middle and high schools.

**Restorative practices' impact on the institutional environment.** In a review of research on school climate, Thapa et al. (2013) cited "a growing body of research that suggests that school connectedness is a powerful predictor of and/or is associated with adolescent health and academic outcomes" (p. 367). McNeely et al. (2002) asserted that difficult management climates in schools that use suspensions and expulsions in response to student misbehavior result in lower school connectedness among students. Loukas (2007) recognized the efficacy of conflict-resolution programs like RP that could promote a student's commitment to the school's community at-large. Teachers' survey responses to the current study indicated their agreement that the use of RP increased students' connections to school. Results from the survey suggest that students hold a more positive identification with the school through its academic programs, extracurricular activities, and social events. This study's results align with a study by Acosta et al. (2019) of a whole-school implementation of a specific program, Restorative Practices Intervention, in which students reported higher levels of student connectedness when instructed by teachers who utilized restorative practices. According to the *Student Handbook* (2019) of High School X in which this study took place, the purpose for the use of restorative practices is "to develop more of a sense of community" (p. 43) through both proactive and reactive approaches to student misbehavior. Those reactive

approaches described in the student handbook include alternatives to the punitive responses of suspension and expulsion. These alternatives include restorative circle conferences intended to reconnect the student to the school rather than using severe punishments that increase the likelihood that students will be driven away from school as Losen (2015) reported. This study confirms the agreement by teachers that the use of both informal and formal restorative practices increases student connectedness to school as these practices often replace traditional and punitive responses to negative student behavior.

**Restorative practices' impact on leadership and professional relationships.** In responding to the survey, teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the use of restorative practices increased their sense of the administration's effectiveness in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school. Improving school climate is dependent on leaders who provide clarity of the school's goals to the staff (Green, 2006). The results of the current study suggest that the behaviors of the school's leaders in defining the purpose of RP as well as implementing and sustaining a whole-school approach to RP were successful. These results echo the report of Guckenberger et al. (2015). Their review of restorative justice literature and interviews with restorative justice practitioners concluded that successful implementation of restorative-type programs was predicated on effective school leadership. Teachers' survey responses also verified their agreement that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development. This supports the conclusion by Hinson (2020) that "invested" (p. 89) administrators provide resources for training teachers in a successful whole-school implementation of RP. Crowe (2017), in a study of teacher and administrator perceptions of restorative justice

programs in urban high schools, cited the critical collaboration between strong administrators and teacher leaders in implementing restorative-type practices that improved the climates within the schools. In the current study, teachers indicated that they agree or strongly agree that the use of RP increases the sense among the school staff of positive attitudes and of a climate supportive of effective working and learning among the adults. The successful implementation of RP is dependent upon an alignment in practices among teachers and administrators (Crowe, 2017). Alger (2018), in a comparison of restorative justice ideology between administrators and teachers, concluded that any inconsistencies between these stakeholder groups resulted in the degradation of both the implementation and sustainability of restorative-type programs and practices. The results of this study indicate that leadership is effective in clarifying the vision for the school and is accessible and supportive of the development of staff members. Furthermore, the study's results confirm an effective working relationship between school staff as a result of the use of RP.

## **Conclusions**

This section presents the conclusions derived from the current study of teachers' perceptions of the impact of the use of restorative practices on school climate. Implications for action and future research are included. The researcher's concluding remarks complete this section.

**Implications for action.** The results of this study have implications for the development of student behavior-management strategies and programs as well as for the improvement of school climate through the strengthening of its interrelated elements. Building and district leaders may use the results of this study to assess the perceptions of

teachers in measuring the success of a whole-school approach to restorative practices. Overall, the study revealed a positive teacher perception that the use of restorative practices improved the school's climate. District leaders may leverage this data to support the implementation of restorative practices across their district's schools. Building leaders can utilize the study's data to identify where restorative practices can foster improvements in school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships.

While teachers indicated that they agree that the use of RP improved school climate, some nuances in the results may provide useful for both school leaders and teachers in the implementation and support of a whole-school approach to student behavior management. Chief among an administrative team's responsibilities is the need to protect both students and staff from physical and verbal abuse and harassment. The study's results identified that to a lesser extent, teachers agreed that students and adults were safe from physical harm through the use of RP. This may be a signal to administrators that RP is not as impactful in reducing physical violence as it may be in reducing verbal harassment and teasing. While the use of RP includes strategies to address physical aggression after the incident, administrators and teachers may need to develop proactive RP strategies for students to avoid physical altercations.

Because the implementation of RP may not lead to increased academic achievement (Augustine et al., 2018) or may only coincide with improved academic performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), this should not be an indicator to administrators and teachers that RP cannot enhance their capacity for improving their classroom practices. Rather, not only do teachers agree that RP increased the use of

supportive instructional practices that have the potential to increase student achievement, they also agree that the use of RP increased teacher support for students' social and civic learning. This result could inform both administrators and teachers that the use of RP can align with increased academic performance and social-emotional skills by students.

For a positive school climate, relationships matter between teachers and students (Jain et al., 2014) and between students and their peers (Acosta et al., 2019). The current study's results are clear that teachers agree that the use of RP increased the supportive relationships teachers have for their students and that students have for each other. Restorative practices offer teachers and students opportunities to negotiate differences and resolve conflicts through both informal and formal processes. Through the use of RP, more positive relationships can be created by the effective dialogue between teachers and their students and between students and their peers (Hinson, 2020). The use of RP in the classroom may lead teachers to more supportive relationships with their students, and, in turn, the use of RP may garner a more respectful attitude of teachers by their students.

The current study's results indicate that teachers felt students were more connected to school through the use of RP. While this may be a function of the improved relationships that RP seem to foster between teachers and students, it may also be an indicator that the reductions in student suspension and expulsion through the use of restorative conferencing may increase a student's connectedness to the school. This result of the use of RP could be a support for the reduction in student dropouts and an increase in graduation rates.

Finally, teachers in the study agree that the use of RP improved leadership, improved support by leadership, and improved supportive staff attitudes and relationships

for working together. Data from the study indicated to a greater extent that the use of RP increases working and learning relationships among the school staff. These results can be helpful to administrators in that they must be especially clear in communicating why and how the implementation of RP supports the larger vision for the school and in how they should avail themselves to teachers to support the use of RP in their classrooms.

Furthermore, teachers can better understand that the implementation of a successful RP program can increase their collaborative nature and contribute to more effective working relationships.

**Recommendations for future research.** This study served to address a void in the body of research regarding the impact of restorative practices on school climate. While Fronius et al., (2016) reported research that linked the use of RP to improved school climate, and Crowe (2017) stated that RP had been “instrumental in changing . . . the climate of the high schools” (p. vii) in the schools she studied, Hurley et al. (2015) determined that much of how RP impacts school climate is left to be answered. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) concluded that research to support restorative-type practices in schools remains in a “nascent state” (p. 305) but offered that early evidence supports improvements in school climate. Multiple studies exist on teachers’ perceptions of the impact of RP on school climate (Augustine et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2014), but this study specifically references the NSCC’s elements of school climate (2017) for its survey items.

Future research on the impact of the use of restorative practices on school climate would benefit from replicating this study with a larger sample size. The results of this study showed agreement by teachers that the use of RP improved school climate, but only



a small sample of the teacher population responded to the survey. While the survey population was small, results from the survey were consistent across each item revealing that teachers agreed or strongly agreed that RP favorably impacted school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, the institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships. A larger sample would offer greater validation to this study's results. Furthermore, conducting the study at a time when students were physically attending school, and, thereby, necessitating a more frequent use of RP by teachers, would create a more immediate context in which teachers may find more value in participating in the study.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) cited the need for more "rigorous outcome-based research" (p. 306) on the attempt of restorative-programs to effect positive change in schools. The use of a pre- and post-restorative practices implementation study similar to that of Augustine et al., (2018) would provide useful data to measure implementation and sustainability of RP across a school district. Additionally, structuring a study that identified teacher perceptions of the use of RP based on teachers' years-of-experience with RP may offer insights about the support teachers require to sustain the effective use of RP in their classrooms. Recommendations for more rigorous research would include conducting the study at both the middle and high school levels as well as to disaggregate responses by job descriptions of the respondents to compare the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and school-support personnel. Administering the study at different stages of a school's implementation of an RP program may provide insights into the perceptions of stakeholders along the way. Finally, because recent studies presented conflicting evidence of the success of RP to raise academic achievement (Darling-Hammond et al.,

2020), further research is recommended on the potential of RP to support student learning.

**Concluding remarks.** Restorative practices emerged from the cultures of ancient populations (Vaandering, 2014; Wachtel, 2016) who utilized conferencing circles to restore citizen offenders to the communities with an understanding of how the offending behavior impacted the community at-large (Wearmouth et al., 2007). These early forms of restorative justice evolved into its modern form within the justice systems of Australia and Canada and were later adopted by those countries' school systems (Biffis & Lockhart, 2008; Guckenberger et al., 2015; Wachtel, 2016). Within schools, restorative justice, typically used as a reaction to student misbehavior, was distilled into the use of proactive and preventative strategies termed restorative practices (Mayworm et al., 2016; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). These practices, when implemented in both the classroom and across a school, provided school administrators and teachers an option to the more traditional and punitive responses to student behavior that increased suspension and dropout rates and disproportionately impacted students of color.

Restorative practices offer the potential for school staff to increase the ability of students to manage conflict and build positive relationships with teachers and with their peers thereby increasing student attitudes toward school and improving the overall school climate. Because teachers most often bear the weight of the implementation of behavior-modification programs like RP, it is important to measure their perceptions of the usefulness of RP to positively impact the interrelated elements of school climate: school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, the institutional environment, and leaderships and professional relationships. The results of this study support the idea

that RP create a school climate in which teachers and students create positive relationships, feel safe from physical and verbal abuse, and work and learn in a community to which they feel connected.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A: The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of  
Teacher Perceptions Survey and Invitation & Consent to Participate**

# Restorative Practices: Impact on School Climate

Participants: Please click on your selected response for each item.

\* Required

## Consent to Participate

I indicate my consent to participate by selecting Yes below. \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Yes
- No (If "No" survey terminates).

## Items Regarding Restorative Practices and their Impact on School Climate

1. The communication of the rules and norms regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing has improved as a result of the use of restorative practices. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. The sense among students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm in the school has increased as a result of the use of restorative practices. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

3. As a result of the use of restorative practices, teachers believe that there is an increased sense among students that they feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

**For Item 4: The National School Climate Center (NSCC) defines supportive teaching practices as the use of encouragement and constructive feedback, varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills, support for risk-taking and independent thinking, atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning, academic challenge, and individual attention to students.**

4. As a result of the use of restorative practices, the use of supportive teaching practices has increased among teachers. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

For Item 5: The NSCC defines Social and Civic Learning as providing support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions including: effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection, emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making.

5. As a result of the use of restorative practices, the support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions has increased among teachers. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

6. As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student, adult-student, adult-adult--and overall norms for tolerance. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

For Item 7: The NSCC defines supportive and caring adult relationships for students as including high expectations for students' success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and a personal concern for students' problems.

7. As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

For Item 8: The NSCC defines supportive peer relationships for students as including friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.

8. As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive peer relationships for students. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

For Item 9: The NSCC defines school connectedness as a positive identification with the school and its norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.

9. As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of school connectedness. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

10. As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense of the effectiveness of the administration in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

11. As a result of the use of restorative practices, there is an increased sense that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

12. As a result of the use of RP, there is an increased sense of the positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

### **Consent to Participate**

You are invited to participate in research project conducted by Justin Bogart to measure teacher perceptions of the impact of restorative practices on school climate. Your participation in this survey is being solicited because of your school's use of restorative practice strategies to prevent and respond to student misbehavior. Your participation in this study will require approximately 10 minutes.

The purpose of this research is to study teachers' perceptions of the impact of the use of restorative practices on the elements of school climate, specifically safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships.

I ask your consent to participate in this research by completing a 12-item, on-line survey. Participation in the survey is voluntary. Responses to the survey are anonymous; the survey does not request your name or any personally identifying information. Data from the survey will be stored in a password-protected spreadsheet. The survey data will be stored for five years. The survey data will be deleted after five years.

If you agree to participate in this research, please click the survey link below. You will mark your consent to participate by marking the permission granted options in the first section the survey.

Restorative Practices: Impact on School Climate--Teacher Perception Survey  
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeoRTNPYnmfHrvNj-17tVx9f8Hic4X-IQul7CPDEIklaOHwbA/alreadyresponded>



**Appendix B: Restorative Practices Continuum**



Figure A1. Restorative practices continuum. Adapted from *Defining restorative*. International Institute for Restorative Practices. T. Wachtel, (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/>.

**Appendix C: Types of Conversation Prompts in Proactive Classroom Circles**

Table 14

*Types of Conversation Prompts in Proactive Classroom Circles*

Type	Prompts
Community-building	<p>What did you do this weekend?</p> <p>What is your favorite recess activity on the playground?</p>
Reflecting & sharing feelings	<p>How are you feeling today?</p> <p>What is something you are grateful for?</p> <p>What have you learned from your experiences about being loyal and sticking together?</p>
Planning & problem-solving	<p>What can you do to improve your behavior in school?</p> <p>Why is it important to set goals?</p> <p>How do you stop yourself from feeling stressed out?</p>

*Note.* Adapted from *Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district*, by C. H. Augustine, et al., (2018). Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2840.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2840.html).

**Appendix D: Questions for Offenders and Victims within a Restorative Circle  
Conference**

Table 15

*Questions for Offenders and Victims within a Restorative Circle Conference*

Type	Questions
Offender	What happened? What were you thinking of at the time? What have you thought about since? Who has been affected by what you have done? What do you need to do to make things right?
Victim	What did you think when you realized what happened? What impact has this incident had on you and others? What has been the hardest thing for you? What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

Adapted from *Defining restorative. International Institute for Restorative Practices*. T. Wachtel, (2016).  
 Retrieved from <https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/>.

**Appendix E: The 13 Dimensions of School Climate Measured by the CSCI**



### THE 13 DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASURED BY THE CSCI

DIMENSIONS	MAJOR INDICATORS
<b>Safety</b>	
<b>1 Rules and Norms</b>	Clearly communicated rules about physical violence, clearly communicated rules about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing, clear and consistent norms and enforcement for adult intervention.
<b>2 Physical Security</b>	Students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school.
<b>3 Social-Emotional Security</b>	Students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.
<b>Teaching and Learning</b>	
<b>4 Support for Learning</b>	Use of supportive teaching practices, such as: encouragement and constructive feedback, varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills, support for risk-taking and independent thinking, atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning, academic challenge, and individual attention.
<b>5 Social and Civic Learning</b>	Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions including: effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection, emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making.
<b>Interpersonal Relationships</b>	
<b>6 Respect for Diversity</b>	Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student, adult-student, adult-adult and overall norms for tolerance.
<b>7 Social Support—Adults</b>	Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students' success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and a personal concern for students' problems.
<b>8 Social Support—Students</b>	Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.
<b>Institutional Environment</b>	
<b>9 School Connectedness-Engagement</b>	Positive identification with the school; norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.
<b>10 Physical Surroundings</b>	Cleanliness, order, appeal of facilities; adequate resources and materials.
<b>Social Media</b>	
<b>11 Social Media</b>	Students feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse/teasing, gossip, and exclusion when online or on electronic devices (ie: Facebook, Twitter, other social media platforms, by an email, text messaging, posting photo/video, etc.).
<b>Staff Only</b>	
<b>12 Leadership</b>	Administration creates and communicates a clear vision and is accessible and supportive of school staff development.
<b>13 Professional Relationships</b>	Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.
schoolclimate.org   The 13 Dimensions of School Climate Measured	

The 13 Dimensions of School Climate is copyrighted by the National School Climate Center and cannot be reproduced in whole or in part without express written consent from NSCC.

*Figure A2.* The 13 dimensions of school climate measured by the CSCI. Adapted from National School Climate Center (2017). *What is school climate and why is it important?* Retrieved May 07, 2017, from <https://www.schoolclimate.org/schoolclimate#:~:text=Synthesizing%20past%20school%20climate%20research,Learning%20and%20the%20external%20environment.>



**Appendix F: IRB Approval**



*Baker University Institutional Review Board*

January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Justin Bogart and Verneda Edwards,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
6. If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [npoell@bakeru.edu](mailto:npoell@bakeru.edu) or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

*Nathan Poell*, MLS  
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee  
Sara Crump, PhD  
Nick Harris, MS  
Christa Manton, PhD  
Susan Rogers, PhD

**Appendix G: Research Proposal to District X**

Public Schools, USD

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Investigator(s): Justin Bogart

Date: 1.21.21

Mailing Address: 6034 Marion St. Shawnee, KS 66218

Telephone: 913-547-6944

Email Address: justinabogart@stu.bakeru.edu

Name and Address of Company, University/College, School/Department:

Baker University, School of Education, 7301 College Blvd. Suite 120, Overland Park, KS 66210

University/College Advisor (applicable to students only): Dr. Verneda Edwards

Complete this form using brief, concise statements and send one copy to Assessments & Research, Public School for presentation to the Research Council (or email to ). This form must be dated and signed by a majority of the Research Council members before commencement of any new research project. The investigator(s) agrees upon completion of the research project to submit a copy of the final report to Assessments & Research.

1. Title or brief description of the proposed study:

The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of Teacher Perceptions

2. Statement of the educational problem:

Restorative practices are being used by more schools in place of traditional and exclusionary methods of discipline as suspension and expulsion. The use of exclusionary discipline policies is often linked to negative school climates for both students and teachers. Current research suggests a link between the use of restorative practices to address student behavior and improved school climate.

3. Specific purpose and expected outcomes:

This researcher proposes to measure teachers' perceptions of restorative practices' impact on school climate. Specifically, the purpose of the research is to assess teachers' perceptions on the impact of restorative practices on the elements of school climate including safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and professional relationships.

4. Hypothesis(es) to be tested (if applicable):

H1. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is improved communication of the school rules and norms regarding physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing.

H2. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students and adults that they feel safe from physical harm in the school.

H3. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense among students that they feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.

H4. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the use of supportive teaching practices has increased among teachers.

H5. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP the support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions has increased among teachers.

H6. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race culture, etc.) at all levels of the school--student-student, adult-student, adult-adult, and overall norms for tolerance.

H7. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive and caring adult relationships for students.

H8. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of patterns of supportive peer relationships for students.

H9. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of school connectedness.

H10. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the effectiveness of the administration in creating and communicating a clear vision for the school.

H11. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense that the administration is accessible and supportive of school staff development.

H12. Teachers perceive that as a result of the use of RP there is an increased sense of the positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.

5. What specific [redacted] Strategic Plan Objectives have you identified as being directly related to this proposal? State the relationship (see enclosed listing) and how [redacted] will benefit from this research:

This research project addresses Goal 4 of the [redacted] strategic Plan 2018-2023: Ensure that schools are trusted as safe places by students, parents, staff, and community. Further, this research project addresses one of the the district's strategic themes: Support the Whole Child.

The use of restorative practices offers the potential to increase the sense of safety that both students and teachers feel when at school, to strengthen the relationships between school personnel and students and between students, to increase the sense of mutual respect of individual differences, and to increase a sense of school connectedness among students. The results of this research may offer data to the district to measure teachers' perceptions of restorative practices in supporting the strategic plan; with this data, the district may be better able to direct its resources to implement restorative practices and support their use within the district's schools.

Finally, this research project addresses the purpose of restorative practices at [redacted] High School as described in the student handbook: "to maintain a positive school climate and restore peace and connectedness after there have been behaviors of concern by individuals in the [redacted] High community" (p. 61).

6. Description of sample needed: grade levels, students, teachers, and/or management employees, and desired location(s) if there is a preference.

The researcher requests to survey teachers at [redacted] High School (and other schools that may be recommended by the committee) who have knowledge and experience with informal (affective statements/restorative questions) to formal (impromptu/formal conferences) restorative practices.

7. Procedures and methods to be employed. (What will be done by the investigator and participants in the study, data to be gathered, and data gathering instruments to be used?) If possible, attach copy of instrument(s) to be used in gathering data.

The researcher will survey teachers using a 12 item electronic survey (see attached copy). Participants will access the survey through a link provided by the researcher. Participants will rate their perceptions for each item using a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

8. Data treatment and analysis:

An on-line, anonymous survey will be used. Responses will not be identifiable by individual respondents. Participants will not be allowed to include their name when completing the survey. Individual responses will be aggregated into data to identify means using the IBM® SPSS® Statistics application. Data from the survey will be stored in a password-protected spreadsheet. Data will be stored for five years. Data will be deleted after five years.

9. Expected starting date: February/March 2021

Duration of study: 2 weeks

Expected completion date of dissertation or final report: May 2021

10. Protection of human subjects:

- a. Rights of privacy guaranteed  
 Permission for participation on record  
 b. Clearance by company, university/college/school

Yes  No   
 Yes  No   
 Yes  No

**Appendix H: Research Approval from District X**

[REDACTED]  
Assessment and Research [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

February 1, 2021

To: Justin Bogart  
6034 Marion St.  
Shawnee, KS 66218

Re: Dissertation Proposal

Dear Justin Bogart,

This letter is in response to your recent request regarding your research titled, *The Impact of Restorative Practices on School Climate: A Study of Teacher Perceptions in the [REDACTED] Public Schools*. The Research Council has approved your request as presented in the proposal. Please ensure district staff understand their participation is optional.

As you proceed with your study, please note that this letter approves the research project as described above, and that it is incumbent upon the researcher(s) to negotiate distribution. The project also must not unduly increase the workload of any employee of the [REDACTED] Public Schools. The [REDACTED] Public Schools staff has the right to discontinue participation at any time. If for any reason it becomes necessary to modify what was originally presented in your proposal, the Research Council must be so informed and approve any changes in advance.

Please submit copies of any reports related to this research to the Office of Assessment and Research and if applicable, be made available to the participating school(s) as well.

On behalf of the [REDACTED] Research Council,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



**Appendix I: Survey Correspondence**

**1. Initial email requesting participation in a restorative practices and school climate survey.**

Dear teacher,

I am a candidate for a doctoral degree at Baker University. I have enjoyed a 26-year career in education, and to fulfill the partial requirements of my degree, I am writing to request your participation in a brief (12-item) survey about teachers' perceptions of restorative practices on school climate.

This research has been approved by the [REDACTED] Research Council. I have attached documentation of the district's approval for your review as necessary.

The survey should take no longer than five minutes to complete. The link to the survey is below:

<https://forms.gle/4tpByZ7yJzUyYKCp8>

Participation in the survey is voluntary. If you consent to participate, please select the "Yes" option on the first screen of the survey. Your responses will be anonymous and used to complete the study.

**The survey will close at 11:00 PM on Thursday, March 4, 2021.**

If you have any questions, please contact me at [justinabogart@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:justinabogart@stu.bakeru.edu) or by phone at (913) 547-6944.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

## **2. Second email request to participate in a restorative practices and school climate survey.**

Good morning!

Recently, you were invited to participate in a research study because you are an educator in a school that utilizes restorative practices. The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of restorative practices on school climate.

If you have already completed this survey, thank you for your time and effort.

If not, I hope that you would consider completing the survey to support the study of restorative practices in a school setting.

This research has been approved by the [REDACTED] Research Council. I have attached documentation of the district's approval for your review as necessary.

The survey should take no longer than five minutes to complete. The link to the survey is below:

<https://forms.gle/4tpByZ7yJzUyYKCp8>

Participation in the survey is voluntary. If you consent to participate, please select the "Yes" option on the first screen of the survey. Your responses will be anonymous and used to complete the study.

**The survey will close at 11:00 PM on Thursday, March 4, 2021.**

If you have any questions, please contact me at [justinabogart@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:justinabogart@stu.bakeru.edu) or by phone at (913) 547-6944.

Thank you, again, for your consideration of this study.

Justin Bogart

### 3. Final email request to participate in a restorative practices and school climate survey.

Dear teachers at [REDACTED] High School,

In the last two weeks, you were invited to participate in a research study because you are an educator in a school that utilizes restorative practices. The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of restorative practices on school climate.

Thanks to all who have participated to this point – your time is invaluable and I appreciate you giving time to the study.

I'm extending a final invitation to participate in the research to accumulate as many responses as possible.

This research has been approved by the [REDACTED] Research Council. I look forward to sharing the results of the study with the school district.

The survey should take no longer than five minutes to complete. The link to the survey is below:

<https://forms.gle/4tpByZ7yJzUyYKCp8>

Participation in the survey is voluntary. If you consent to participate, please select the "Yes" option on the first screen of the survey. Your responses will be anonymous and used to complete the study.

**The survey will close at 11:00 PM on Thursday, March 4, 2021.**

If you have any questions, please contact me at [justinabogart@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:justinabogart@stu.bakeru.edu) or by phone at (913) 547-6944.

Thank you, again, for your consideration of this study.

Justin Bogart  
Doctoral Candidate  
Baker University  
Overland Park, KS