

**Becoming Restorative:  
Three Schools Transitioning to a Restorative Practices Culture**

Research Brief | [urcues.org](http://urcues.org)

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October 2017

Restorative practices (RP), an alternative discipline approach focused on repair rather than punishment, has attracted the attention of school districts throughout the United States. As mounting evidence demonstrates the long-standing system of punitive discipline to be not only ineffective in reducing behavioral incidents but to be detrimental to young people, particularly those of color, districts are increasingly turning to the research-supported practice of restorative justice (Marsh, 2017). In New York State, numerous cities have introduced initiatives to bring RP into their schools. New York City's Department of Education, for example, instituted a policy toward behavior that incorporated RP in 2015, precipitated by a two-decade long rise in student suspensions and an overrepresentation of black students being suspended (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2013). Similarly, the Rochester City School District has recently reworked its code of conduct with a de-emphasis on suspensions through the use of RP (Murphy, 2016).

This brief highlights three schools located in the urban districts of New York City and Rochester, N.Y., each committed to restorative justice reform: Leadership and Public Service High School (LPS) in Manhattan, World of Inquiry School (WOIS) in Rochester, and East Lower and Upper Schools (East) in Rochester. Presented here are the experiences they shared with us at the Center for Urban Education Success (CUES) through a series of interviews that included administrators, a university professor, teachers, social workers, and a student. Interviews with several LPS staff, conducted by *The New York Times Magazine*, supplement these accounts<sup>1</sup>. Together, these stories are intended to provide a more intimate, personal depiction of a movement whose successes and challenges have been well-documented in research (Marsh, 2017).

Transforming a school's culture is not easy and the experiences shared by members of these three school communities attest to the difficulties but also illustrate successes. As will be shown, each of these schools – like any school community – approaches restorative justice reform in their own way. However, there are also similarities among their stories, which are organized here into eight elements – **Leadership, Community Building, Relationships, Whole School Buy-in, Community Agencies, Training, Sustainability, and Time** – that contribute to a school's transformation to an RP culture.

Before entering into a discussion of RP implementation, each school is first introduced here. These introductory sections are followed by nine detailed sections on each element of RP

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<sup>1</sup> These interviews are part of a feature article, "The Halls of Justice" by Susan Dominus, about Leadership and Public Service High School's implementation of restorative practices, published in *The New York Times Magazine* on September 11, 2016.

implementation. This brief concludes with reports on the successes and challenges the schools are experiencing at this point in their culture transitions.

### Three Urban Schools Introduced

The three schools are similar in their urban locales as well as with their student population demographics (high percentage of economically disadvantaged; high percentage of minority students). They are all public schools with no screening criteria for admission. However, as Table 1 shows, each has a different grade configuration, with Leadership & Public Service (LPS) comprising the traditional high school grades 9-12, World of Inquiry School (WOIS) comprising kindergarten- grade 12, and East combining two schools (Lower – grades 6-8; Upper – grades 9-12) within a larger secondary school structure (grades 6-12). The schools also differ as to how long each has been actively implementing culture change. Their histories and how each school came to focus on adopting a restorative justice philosophy also differ, as will be discussed below.

Table 1

*General Information about LPS, WOIS, and East.*

<u>School</u>	<u>RP began</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Total Enrollment</u>	<u>Minority Students</u>	<u>Economically Disadvantaged</u>
Leadership & Public Service (LPS)	2011	New York City District #2, Manhattan	672 (grades 9-12)	96%	74%
World of Inquiry, School #58 (WOIS)	2015	Rochester City School District (RCSD)	875 (grades K-12)	88%	78%
UR-East EPO (East)	2015	UR-East (within RCSD)	1393 (grades 6-12)	92%	91%

#### Leadership & Public Service (LPS)

This high school in Manhattan's financial district began experimenting with RP in 2011 when Principal Phil Santos arrived. Lead Dean, Randy Spotts, recalls that at that time, Santos "was concerned about not only the number of suspensions, but the number of Black and Hispanic males in particular that were being suspended, time and time again." The discrepancy of disproportionate suspensions for students of color compared to their white counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) gave Santos pause. "I had never realized just how deeply race penetrated all of our actions, whether we are conscious of it or not. It made me, as a Latino man, re-examine my own practice, to think about my own internal biases," he says (Dominus, 2016). LPS was an early adopter of RP in the district and first among the three schools highlighted in this brief. According to Spotts, "When we started, there may have been other schools doing it, but it certainly wasn't the norm." During the time of my interview with Dean Spotts, LPS was in its sixth year of RP implementation

### **World of Inquiry School #58**

According to Principal Sheela Webster, WOIS was founded in response to the race riot in the late 1960s in Rochester (Marcotte, 2008). At that time, she says that the Rochester City School District and community partners that included the University of Rochester “wanted to build a school that would center kids and teachers as the most important components of the teaching environment and provide almost a population here that’s a microcosm of the city.” In this effort, WOIS started as an elementary school. The school community found the principles espoused in the Expeditionary Learning (EL)<sup>2</sup> philosophy congruous to their mission. They began implementing EL principals in 2001 and continued with its implementation for several years during which time, Webster says, WOIS “achieved some really successful data which prompted the community and the district to ask us to grow out.” In 2009, with the help of a Gates Foundation grant, WOIS began a grow-out process which ended in 2015 with a final expansion to include grade 12. Webster credits this foundation, which took over 10 years to build, with her school’s successful incorporation of RP, which WOIS began implementing in 2015. She explained that while the EL principles were essential in improving and shaping WOIS, the experience of expanding from an elementary school to a K-12 school required additional focus on culture, which RP offered.

### **UR-East EPO**

In 2015, at the request of the Rochester City School District (RCSD) Board of Education, East Upper & Lower Schools (formerly known as East High School) entered into a partnership with the University of Rochester to turn the school around. Prior to this agreement, East was on the brink of school closure due to several years of persistently low achievement and high rates of absences and drop outs. According to the state education department, the new arrangement is categorized as an Educational Partnership Organization (EPO), guided by a five-year plan that the University proposed and the state approved. The EPO also serves as a district within RCSD’s larger district. The plan is based on a belief that with sustained focus on strong teaching, dynamic curriculum, and appropriate social-emotional support, the school can markedly improve, becoming a place where all students will find success. The interviews included in this brief were conducted when East was in its second year of the five-year plan. According to Dr. Bonnie Rubenstein, a professor from the University of Rochester who worked on the social-emotional component of the EPO plan, the students at East had historically experienced high rates of disciplinary referrals and suspensions, along with ongoing issues of trauma and loss. This history necessitated a detailed, systematic approach to students’ well-being. According to Dr. Rubenstein, RP was “really the big umbrella” encompassing the systems, beliefs, and philosophies of social-emotional health outlined in practices like restorative conversations and family groups (small groups of students and adult facilitators who meet daily to build relationships). East began implementing RP during the EPO’s first year, 2015.

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<sup>2</sup> Expeditionary Learning (EL) is a schooling model, focused on project-based learning and based on 10 design principles, that began as a collaboration between Harvard University and Outward Bound USA in 1991 (EL Education, 2017).

### Elements of Restorative Practices Culture Change

At its core, transitioning to a RP approach requires a school's deep culture to change (Larson, DeAngelis, & Nelms, 2017). The ten school community members whose insights are presented here describe and illustrate the elements of culture change from their personal perspectives. CUES collected their impressions through interviews with them at their schools. All interviewees come from one of the three schools highlighted in this brief, filling a variety of roles: two principals, two deans, two teachers, a student, two social workers, and a university professor.

Figure 1 represents these elements and how they work to affect culture change as well as their interaction with each other. Time, working both at times as a facilitator and at others as an impediment, is a conduit/channel along which the other eight elements progress, resist, and interact with each other. For example, schools that are working toward an RP culture often begin by **building community** with an emphasis on **relationships**. They learn how to connect with each other using restorative tools, which requires **training** – often supported by a school **leader** and provided by **community agencies**. All of this happens over **time**, not immediately.

### Elements of Restorative Practice Culture Change

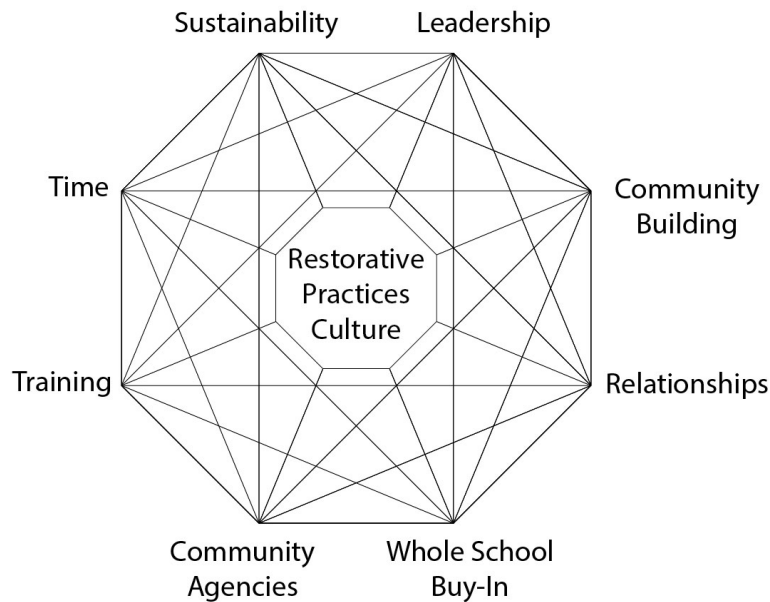


Figure 1: Transitioning to a restorative practices culture involves eight elements (Leadership, Community-Building, Relationships, Whole School Buy-In, Community Agencies, Training, Time, & Sustainability) that each impact culture reform, and also interact with each other to produce change.

The eight elements contributing to RP culture change in Figure 1 are also displayed below in outline form, which is followed by longer, more detailed subsections on each.

### **Elements of RP Culture Change**

- Leadership
- Community Building
- Relationships
- Whole School Buy-in
- Community Agencies
- Training
- Sustainability
- Time

### **Leadership**

One of the qualities that facilitates successful RP implementation at schools is visionary, focused leadership (Guckenberg, Hurley, Persson, Fronius, & Petrosino, 2015; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006). School staff and administrators themselves describe leaders who believe in the RP approach from a moral, humane standpoint, and who are willing to prioritize RP in the face of skepticism, inexperience, and resistance. One such administrator, Principal Phil Santos of LPS, committed himself and his school to RP once he became aware of his school's record of frequent suspensions, particularly among students of color, and then re-examined racism's role in everyone's actions, including his own. The year Santos was hired, he invited a trainer to introduce RP during a professional development session for staff. According to Dean Spotts, "She was just one person who came in and gave a speech about restorative practices," and her speech made little impact. But the next year, Santos hired her as a dean, a move that expressed his commitment and priority. Further, he personally urged teachers to reconsider sending students out of class in favor of calmly talking to them privately, to even bear responsibility for escalating tensions among students during a behavior incident. While most of the staff at LPS got on board with Santos's vision, he did lose 11 staff members that first year when he made clear his commitment to RP. Similarly, WOIS Principal Sheela Webster demonstrated her commitment to RP during the school's first year of implementation when there was, as she describes, a particularly difficult incident during a sporting event involving a racial slur and another school. At the time, WOIS (and Webster herself) had little experience with RP, yet she insisted on using the RP approach of circling with students and adults from both schools. She recalls, "It was like the blind leading the blind, but I had faith that if you brought people together and you could have a facilitator that helps you to articulate what you were feeling, we would come to a peaceful resolution" – which they did. At East, where culture change is at its earliest stages in comparison to the other two schools, leadership is more distributed. For example, all of the teachers and administrators at East are responsible for a family group where they frequently implement the relationship-building aspects of RP (Cavanagh, Vigil, & Garcia, 2014). East also has a Restorative Practices Committee, a voluntary group that includes social workers, counselors, teachers, a teaching assistant, and an administrator that organically formed to guide

East's transition to a restorative framework. Two of the members of this committee, social workers Michelle Garcia and Andrew Goodman, were interviewed for this brief. Although the committee is doing essential work to prepare and support East to be "restorative," they believe that leadership would help them in their work. Garcia says, "It takes more than just saying we're gonna do it. It takes some kind of dynamic person—it takes something more... It still requires a leader to drive it." LPS and WOIS have trained all staff and rely on teacher leaders to implement RP, and there are also administrative leaders at both schools who have demonstrated their belief and commitment to a practice that may feel unfamiliar to school communities.

### **Build Community – Starting with Adults**

Research shows that there is a connection between successful implementation of RP and the community's adults using it to interact with each other. (Gregory, Soffer, Gains, Hurley, & Karikhalli, 2016a). This finding was supported in the schools presented in this brief. At LPS, during the initial "roll-out" of RP, Principal Santos introduced the staff to faculty circles. Dean Spotts recalls, "He had us actually sitting in a circle, discussing school-wide issues. One of those issues being how are we going to start to implement this restorative practice?" Similarly, Principal Webster, who says that most of the work her school does is built on teacher leadership, also describes an approach to RP that began with adults. She explains that after participating in RP training, WOIS teachers and administrators "embed what we learn into all of our professional development that's in-house here. So we're used to having people in circles because we do morning meetings and we do lots of circle kinds of team-building, so we just deepened that practice." East recognized the importance of involving adults in using RP with each other when they too began circling with staff, inviting members to share their frustrations, satisfactions, and questions about RP. They learned that there were some who felt left out of the school's culture because they were not made aware of training opportunities, which in turn spurred a redoubled effort to involve every adult in the building in RP training. By year two of RP implementation, Goodman says, "we have trained every single SSO [school security officer], cafeteria member, clerical member, custodial member, and our off-site team. Those five groups had not been included in year one. They were angry about it." By starting with adults, these three school communities are modeling a practice and a culture that they fully expect to penetrate community-wide.

### **A Priority on Relationships**

An emphasis on people and how they best relate to each other lies at the heart of an RP culture (Cavanagh, Vigil, & Garcia, 2014; Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016b; Zehr, 2015). The RP commitment to students encompasses more than academic achievement or behavioral modifications and goes beyond typical indicators of what makes a school successful. Principal Webster says she "wasn't actually looking at [implementing RP] from the lens of 'I wanna decrease our suspension rate or tackle the discipline system.' I was really looking at it as we are only going to be as good as our relationships are with each other and with our kids." Using RP also indicates a link between relationships and achievement, as Dr. Rubenstein illustrated when explaining East's approach to social and emotional support: "I've always known. I've reviewed research for decades that showed that if you pay attention to a student's social emotional health, academic achievement will be impacted positively." Goodman refers to a quotation for what he believes happens when relationships are de-emphasized in a school's culture: "Rules without

relationships leads to rebellion.” He and the rest of East’s RP Committee use this phrase to emphasize the importance of relationships. “It’s not 50 years ago, when a kid would just come in and for no reason just respect the teacher and do what he is told. It is all about relationships now,” he explains. Accordingly, a teacher’s role is profoundly impacted by a school’s transition to an RP culture, as LPS Spanish teacher, Carolina Ibáñez, acknowledged. She said that the challenge in overcoming her preconceptions about her role as a teacher meant “addressing more than what’s in the book. To get to the book, you really have to address the child’s emotional state first.” (Dominus, 2016, p. 62). Therefore, when transitioning to an RP framework, schools – so accustomed to focusing on academics above all else – must find ways to prioritize relationships, not at the cost of academic success, but actually in support of it.

The RP approach offers two main tools for building relationships with students: proactive circling and reparative circling (Guckenberger, 2015; Wachtel, 2013). Garcia describes East’s approach to proactive circling “where we’re just getting to know each other or we’re celebrating things that we’re proud of or we’re talking about what are our interests.” Both East and LPS use an advisory period (the aforementioned *family group* at East) for these kinds of conversations that serve the purpose of connecting, either over something more celebratory, like a birthday, or something more serious, like a loss. Webster, too, has plans to implement RP into a 23-minute daily advisory period at WOIS. Dean Spotts explains how advisory periods can be used to further the implementation of RP when he says, “advisory is held, and should be held in the restorative format. Restorative practices are not just to resolve conflicts, but restorative justice and restorative practices also enable groups to sit and discuss a number of issues.” He sees the advisory period at LPS as a training ground for RP. Advisories that adults and students use to build relationships also offer opportunities to address more serious issues when they arise, as was the case last spring when Goodman joined a group to help them process another student’s loss of a brother through suicide. He recalled, that, “every single person in that family group, because of the way that they had used that time, was deeply impacted.” They were able to discuss how they were feeling about the trauma and how they would support their fellow family group member when they returned to school.” Since this group had spent time proactively building relationships, they were better prepared to engage in a meaningful conversation when a crisis arose for someone in their community.

The second type of tool RP offers communities are restorative conferences, when repair is needed (Wachtel, 2013). Garcia explains the difference between punitive action and a restorative conference, during which “we want to hear your side of the story, but with that, you’re gonna hear his side of the story and you’re gonna hear my side of the story. We’re all gonna be able to see where each person’s lens comes from with the goal of repairing and restoring that relationship.” When asked why he thinks RP work at his school, East student, Gregory says that having a voice when a conflict occurs is what he appreciates most is. “At East, I feel like they just listen to us. Because you’re not gonna get the whole story if you only listen to one side. [It] gives us a chance to be heard, before they do any acts of consequences.” As these examples demonstrate, prioritizing relationships goes far to remediate a punitive culture and prepare community members to listen to each other, value fairness, and feel heard.

### **Entire School Community Buy-In (Eventually)**

According to Goodman, the first task of East's RP Committee was an understanding that "if we're gonna be a restorative school, we have to get everyone on board." As a RP philosophy is based on a different set of values than a punitive system with which most community members are more familiar, convincing everyone of RP's worth can be a process (Gregory et al., 2016b; Guckenberg, 2015). A teacher may wonder, what exactly are they buying into? According to Dean Dunlevy (former RP trainer whom Principal Santos hired as a dean at LPS), "the shift requires teachers to rethink the very concept of justice, rejecting a model of punishment in which most were trained and most likely raised" (Dominus, 2016). And Dean Spotts shares that even now, after six years of implementation at LPS, "I think most teachers believe in it. [But] sometimes, we just want what we want. It's hard to break out of that value set of 'I'm an authority figure and I need you to do what I say.'" In response to a common perception that RP enables bad behavior rather than mediates it, Garcia insists, "we're absolutely not enabling them. We expect them to make good choices, and we're going to help them and support them along the way." To that goal, East approaches community buy-in by using a model that calls for a high expectation of accountability from all community members paired with a high threshold of support to reach a restorative culture (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). Webster credits the school's largely enthusiastic embrace of RP at WOIS to 10 years of building a foundation of values that aligned with the restorative philosophy. Yet, the transition is often experienced as "messy," says Principal Santos, and time consuming. By virtue of their profession, social workers are often the community members most familiar with RP, as is the case at East, where Goodman, Garcia, and their team bear most of the responsibility for implementing the practice. But, as East teacher Clay Monson comments, "if we were truly embracing restorative initiatives, [social workers] wouldn't be the only heavy lifters." Dean Spotts, offering a more realistic expectation of community buy-in, comments, "Do all [community members] do it? I don't know, you could say all people don't do anything they're supposed to do, but I think the majority of the teachers, the majority of the staff certainly work in [the RP] format." Principal Webster attributes teacher resistance to being new at a school, when she says, "Every time you bring in new people, new processes, you always have skepticism, but I have way more of a critical mass than I do skepticism." Webster estimates that approximately 60% of the classrooms she visits are using RP. Both Principal Webster and Dean Spotts indicate a tipping point of sorts – a critical mass of community members who believe in RP in order for a school's successful transition.

It's not only the community's adults who can be skeptical of RP. According to East student Gregory, students sometimes appease adults during a restorative conference by telling their teachers or counselors what they know they're supposed to in an effort to escape the conversation as quickly as possible. WOIS has made efforts to ameliorate student skepticism by including them and their parents in training.

According to Principal Webster:

Bringing kids and their families together really levels the playing field for all parties because I think when you're a parent and you don't actually know what was said in that conversation, you have your own assumptions about what worked and what didn't, but if you get to be a part of it—what I see almost right away is a decrease in tension between



the two kids and the two parents when somebody says I'm really regretting I did that or I really own that I did that and I'm sorry that it impacted you that way.

Thus, according to these schools' stories and aligning with research (Gregory et al., 2016a), RP success and survival requires involving the entire school community, both inside and outside the building.

### **Community Agencies and Training**

The schools we spoke with each worked with community agencies – Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PIRI) in Rochester and Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility in NYC, to provide initial training and then subsequent ongoing training to members of the school community. This practice is in concert with research that finds schools must work with outside agencies in order to achieve transformative RP reform (Scott, Moses, Finnigan, Trujillo, & Jackson, 2017). Training can be offsite, as was the case for seven teachers from LPS who spent five summer days in initial training at Morningside, followed by school visits from their Morningside trainer who spent time coaching deans at LPS. These school-based sessions were followed up by principal Santos, who according to Dean Spotts, “would actually pull us out of class a couple of periods a week, to sit down and go over this whole process of rebuilding and repositioning the way we look at discipline.” At East and WOIS in Rochester, PIRI provided initial training and training for trainers – like social worker Michelle Garcia, who continued instilling RP throughout the school community. Training extended to students and their parents in these school communities as well. All of this training and support, provided by outside agencies, also required financial support which each of these schools received from their districts.

### **Sustainability**

Once a school reaches the critical mass that Dean Spotts and Principal Webster identify, they must then find ways to sustain the RP culture they have worked hard to establish. According to our research, not only do schools need financially-supported, ongoing training, they also need a vision for how they will maintain RP culture year after year. In looking to the future, Principal Webster identifies the challenge of

keeping the momentum moving so it doesn't sound like, 'oh no, another circle.' It's always about deepening. I want circles to feel so natural in daily practice whenever and wherever they are needed, so that it becomes a fabric of our school, that it's not the entity that we bring in. That's a challenge.

Goodman and Garcia envision a fuller transfer of RP responsibility to East teachers and staff over the next several years, so that by the fourth or fifth year of RP implementation at East, “if your classroom is going poorly, you don't have to call the social worker. You've been circling enough as part of your practice that you can just circle up your class and say, yesterday went really poorly.”

Motivated by successes with RP for improving relationships, WOIS and East are now thinking about how to bring RP into academic situations. Says Principal Webster, RP is

not just in the relationship building and character development, but also in effective uses of question and discussion protocols. When you really want kids to be active participants in being able to share their learning or to ask questions, you need a protocol for this.

What does RP academic circling look like? Goodman explains,

On some level, it's basically the same concept [as relationship building or repair], but with academics. You're sitting in a circle, you're using a talking piece. Somebody is the keeper of the circle so that they summarize what is said. It's basically getting kids to learn through the circle process, so learning from others, listening to others... processing an idea.

According to Webster, with academic circling

there's a commitment on all of our parts to actually sit in a circle. You have to face each other. You don't have the option of putting your head down while somebody else is responding. You don't have to be the one with your hand up, but when it comes to you, you have the option of passing.

Principal Webster illustrates how academic circling invites students to ask authentic questions, admit when they are confused, by giving an example from one of WOIS's math classrooms:

Our geometry teacher, decided to use an academic circle to help review test items that kids had missed and he was able to, in that academic circle, get kids to speak about their errors or miscues and processes that would allow them to clean that up and what their goals are.

So, while not necessarily complicated, academic circling looks radically different from the traditional classroom, where students sit in rows facing the backs of each other's heads and the teacher stands at the front of the room directing the conversation.

At LPS, the advent of social media has brought on new terrain for the school to include as their use of RP continues to evolve. Spotts says,

There's less of [the violent incidents of years past] but—there's a lot more work on our part because we have social media that we have to deal with, the bullying, and some of the things that still go on. I guess maybe that's the next phase in this thing.

As they look to the future of bringing RP into the domains of academics and social media, these schools are envisioning a fuller and expanding conceptualization of RP culture.

## **Time**

Restorative practices require time, not only during the school day, but also in the long-term (Gregory et al., 2016a) as any culture transformation will; therefore, the next two subsections discuss different aspects of time and how they impact RP.

**School Day Logistics.** As traditional high school time is set up according to a model – often referred to as a “factory model” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) – that moves students through a series of subjects and corresponding spaces for which specific periods of time are allotted, finding time for restorative circling to build community and restorative conferencing to repair harm can be a challenge. As discussed earlier, schools are using their advisory period or family group period to build community through RP and are also planning to incorporate RP into academic formats, which would infuse RP throughout students’ and teachers’ entire days. Thus, the three schools we visited are finding both windows of opportunity and challenges to incorporate RP into the structure of the school day.

According to Dean Spotts, logistical difficulties are more common when the situation calls for repair between a student and a teacher, rather than between two students. He explains,

When [the problem is] teacher-to-student and the teacher might have a class, then we have to figure that out, because they don’t want us pulling teachers out of classes to have circle. We have to work around the schedule to find time.

Clay Monson further explains that for students, “[they] know to come to [the social workers] when they need us to circle, but for a teacher to be able to do it, there's some scheduling logistical stuff that has to go on.” Relatedly, standardized assessments can also interfere with conferencing when a conflict arises. Dean Spotts told us about a recent example, when

there was a teacher yesterday, wanted to have a circle. We’re in the middle of mid-terms right now, and because of his class schedule, he wasn’t going be able to do it. It’s not going happen now until after the break, which is unfortunate, because of the testing.

While students do have some options in seeking out RP support from adults other than their teachers during the school day, their schedules are also fairly full, so that when a teacher, like Monson, tries to initiate an RP conference, he too can run up against challenging logistics. He says, “I’ve requested mediation throughout the year, and well, [the student may] only be available during lunch, for example. Then you try and meet, and then it’s only 30 minutes, and then that doesn’t go through.” As these stories suggest, schools sometimes struggle to find ways to circumvent or creatively work within the time structure of schooling in order for RP to work. Monson suggests providing sub-coverage for teachers who need to meet with a student who has a different free period than they do and also giving more opportunities for teachers to work as facilitators, as they do at WOIS. Dean Spotts explains that at LPS, they intentionally trained their three deans (who also teach classes) in RP and then arranged their schedules so that one of them was always free to facilitate or schedule a circle when the need arises.

**Long-Term Expectations.** The practitioners we interviewed shared an understanding that transitioning to an RP culture takes years. When he considers the long-term changes they are trying to implement at East, Goodman compares punitive discipline (and the harm it causes youth) to a public health crisis. He says,

Just like any other public health intervention, you don't measure for five to seven years. We didn't set out to fix AIDS in a year, but in the course of 25 years, you could say that that is not a terminal diagnosis anymore. . . . That we're addressing the crisis in a way that over five to seven years we will see that the school climate and all of those things have improved to a point where it's an institution of learning. I do think that it is a process.

Principal Webster estimates that it took WOIS 10 years to transform its culture. She says they did it in five year increments – “I think it takes five-year increments to build a culture that is collaborative.” Spotts says it took a “solid” three years before LPS reached a cultural tipping point shifting to RP. As East was in its second year of RP implementation and simultaneous culture change during our interviews, the practitioners were optimistic yet realistic in their attitudes. Explaining his expectations for how change will occur at East, Monson says,

We feel like we're a restorative school, but we're in year two, right? In a lot of ways, we just can't possibly be there yet, and a lot of the restorative practices that are happening in the Lower School will trickle up, and that would be more use of therapy, less resistance, and people would just be more on the page as generations go through.

Monson refers to a gradual, long-term transformation that will involve intentionality, but also a natural process of attrition and movement of students through their high school years.

Dean Spotts explains another aspect of how time influences the long-term implementation of RP. He believes that:

People have to have patience with this, and understand that, first of all these are teenagers, they're high school students. The vulnerability and just the uneven flow of their temperament, it may resolve today, doesn't mean it's always gonna be resolved; something could come up. We have to go back again, and do it again. That's just part of it, to me.

Here, Spotts, the most veteran of the RP practitioners we interviewed, reveals an acceptance that the RP process is imperfect and an understanding that some issues will repeatedly resurface over time. Frequently, students or teachers need time before they are ready to participate in a restorative conference. Spotts shared that just the week before our interview,

Two girls—I don't want to say they tried to avoid it, but it went on for four or five days, until we finally got both of them together. By that time, they were ready to talk, they were ready to listen to and discuss what the real issues were. Sometimes time gets anger to subside.

As such, time works with and against RP implementation. When time poses a challenge, community buy-in and the extent to which a culture has moved toward an RP approach can ameliorate difficulties. Describing his attitude toward time with regard to RP, Dean Spotts remarks,

One good thing, and the kids know, if we don't get to it today, if we don't get to it tomorrow, we're gonna get to it at some point, so you're not gonna be able to avoid it. You're not gonna be able to by-pass it. I know sometimes teachers get anxious, particularly teachers get anxious because they really want to resolve the issue, and sometimes it's just not, time wise, it's not feasible in that moment. It takes time.

### **Successful Results (So Far...)**

RP culture focuses on well-being rather than order. The two are not mutually exclusive, as RP espouses an approach that promotes community members in relationship with each other, ultimately leading to a peaceful, non-violent co-existence, which could also be understood as orderly. However, relationships are not always peaceful, and as our interviewees shared, nurturing relationships means facing conflicts which can often disrupt the order of the school day and make community members uncomfortable. Yet, a punitive focus on order, which allows students and teachers to follow their schedules and spend time on academics, often can easily ignore well-being, especially when a conflict arises.

Given the imperfect nature of RP, its impactful elements, and the help and hindrance of time, what does a culture in transition look like at these schools? At all three, a significant decrease in disciplinary referrals and suspensions provides a quantitative measure of culture change. East Upper School, for example, has seen a precipitous drop in suspensions, from 2,591 the year before the school began its university-EPO partnership to 221 during the second year of the partnership and RP implementation. Such a difference reflects a major change in practices and implies a significant change in culture. Yet, what our interviews more fully elucidated was a feeling – one of increasing safety and health. Dean Spotts recalls that before RP,

There was a lot of violence outside of the building, in the streets. I would have to go to McDonalds and get kids. The manager at McDonalds had my number. Several community businesses had my number because we had so many problems with the kids. Now, as time has gone on, [RP] has become a lot more instilled in the culture of the school, the building feels safer, and there's less violence.

At East, Gregory also emphasizes safety when he describes that RP has allowed him and his fellow classmates to “go on in a school environment, safely, so that everybody is completely safe. They feel comfortable around each other.” After 10 years of culture change at WOIS (with the past two focused on RP), Principal Webster says,

I feel like we're in a healthy place in terms of adult relationships as well as student relationships. I think [RP] has allowed us to have some really hard discussions that needed to be had. I think our trust is increasing and this year, we've been able to have discussions around race relationships, equity, our own experiences, and our viewpoints in ways that we haven't done previously, so I think it's allowed us to build a more safe environment.

Here, Webster describes a safe school environment as one where difficult, and often contentious, conversations can occur peacefully. Garcia adds levity to their view of success when she admits, "I'm not saying they happen every day, but I think every time you can get people to sit down and listen to each other and hear each other, and people are validated, I think those are successes." Dean Spotts also lends his realistic perspective on RP success at LPS when he says, "That's not to say we don't have any [violence], but there's *way* less."

In addition to a safer, more comfortable environment, our interviewees also revealed student ownership of RP as demonstrative of culture change. Gregory says that at East, "I feel like—I think everyone's on track with the restorative conversations, 'cause nobody really wants to have an issue with anyone here, but things do happen," and he's seeing his classmates starting to initiate circles. Likewise, students are also asking adults to help them at restorative conferences. Says Dean Spotts, "Kids now even come to us and say, 'I want to have a circle with'... 'I want to sit down with'... 'I need a mediation with'..." At WOIS, Webster says that RP is "much more deeply implemented in kindergarten through grades six and seven/eight." She says that the multiplicity of classes and schedule variations makes implementation at the high school level more challenging (as touched upon earlier); however, she also explains an advantage of RP at the high school, as the place where

I get a lot of buy-in from kids who want to continue to be leaders of their own learning, so I have now finally kids who wanna build a student council and it's not us saying, you need a student council.

As these accounts show, the path to culture change takes time and often falls back or veers off in different directions, which is why RP requires more patience and tolerance with the messiness of relationships. Spotts describes it as

A long-term commitment. You can't say, okay we had a circle, we resolved, and we hope it's over. We want to feel like it's over, but we have the understanding that it might not be, and we may be back here again.

Like any relationship worth fostering and maintaining, the RP approach, although not easy, honestly deals with the complexity of humans in a community, in a relationship, and with an eye toward well-being. Such communities address all of its members, whether they be compliant, defiant, or anywhere in between, with compassion and a shared sense of responsibility for the culture in which they live together.

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