

A Process Evaluation of the Implementation of Restorative Practices at Whit Davis Elementary and Clarke Middle Schools



www.gaconflict.org

P.O. Box 82024

Athens, Ga 30608

May 2021

***GCC's theory of change** is that restorative practices will improve personal and academic achievement for all students by building a culture of respect, mutual support and inclusion; improving relationships between adults and students; and promoting communication, conflict resolution skills and accountability. By promoting collaborative conversation, support and accountability around referrals and student behavior, restorative practices also address the racial disparities in discipline.*

Restorative Justice is not just a punishment alternative... it's something you do to be human with each other.

- David Yusem

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
I. Introduction	6
Data Sources and Methodology	7
II. Overview of Restorative Practices in Schools	8
III. Guiding Vision for Restorative Practices	11
IV. Trends in Student Discipline in Clarke County School District.....	12
V. Timeline and Staff Reflections of Implementation at CMS	13
CMS BASELINE: prior to 2017	13
SY 17-18 Exploring RP through Professional Learning and examining systems.....	13
SY 2018-19 Committing to RP through intensive training, a part-time Restorative Coordinator in the building, and a stronger focus on community building	14
Staff perspectives on the transition.....	16
2019/20: Hiring a full-time Restorative Coordinator, transforming punitive practices	17
2020/21 Integrating community building within virtual learning, transformation of punitive spaces and practices, and perceptions of culture change.....	18
VI. Timeline and Staff Reflections of Implementation at WDES	21
WDES Baseline.....	21
SY 18-19 Beginning the conversation	21
2019-20: A push toward more intentional application of RP, more stability on GCC side	22
Staff perspectives on the transition at WDES	24
2020/21: Restorative Practices and Virtual Learning	25
VII. RP and Racial Disproportionality in Discipline at WDES and CMS.....	27
VIII. Lessons and Recommendations	29
Enabling factors	29
Common challenges in the transition	29
Game changers in building restorative culture	30
Promising signs of change	31
Areas for growth.....	32
Recommendations for continued improvement.....	34
Annex 1: Interview Guide and more detailed description of methodology.....	35

<i>Annex 2: Glossary of terms</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Annex 3: WDES Restorative Response to Office-referred Behavior</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Annex 4: CMS Progressive Discipline System</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Annex 5: Samples from WDES Scope and Sequence, sample circle flows.....</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

Acknowledgements

Our team at GCC is grateful to the staff at Clarke Middle School and Whit Davis Elementary School for giving their time and expertise to the work of Restorative Practices, and to the preparation of this process evaluation. We want to thank the Local School Governance Teams at both schools for funding the work of Restorative Practices over the past three years, and for funding this process evaluation. We also thank Clarke County School District for allowing GCC to conduct the staff interviews and for their general support to this work.

I. Introduction

The report summarizes the data from a process evaluation (Box 1), of the ongoing implementation of restorative practices (RP) at Clarke Middle School (CMS) and Whit Davis Elementary School (WDES). It is drawn from 20 interviews with staff at the two schools, and complemented with quantitative data collected by each school on student discipline and restorative interventions. As the two schools are three (CMS) and two (WDES) years into the transition toward restorative culture, this report is meant to inform ongoing implementation.

This process evaluation documents the transition from exclusionary discipline structures toward restorative school culture from the perspective of those charged with implementing it. It is not designed to evaluate outcomes of the work, nor can it establish whether the interventions “worked” or failed. In addition, it cannot completely separate implementation of RP from other ongoing initiatives in the buildings.

The authors did not interview students, parents or members of the wider community for this report. Gathering these perspectives is planned for a future phase that will seek to evaluate outcomes of the RP work.

The report is divided into eight sections. The remainder of the introduction gives an overview of the data sources and methodology. The following three sections set the context with a brief overview of the evidence on RP in schools, and the guiding vision for RP at both schools, followed by an overview of recent trends in student discipline across Clarke-County School District (CCSD). Sections 5 and 6 document the timeline of implementation at each school through the experiences of staff. Section 7 discusses the challenge of addressing racial disparities in discipline with RP and identifies areas for further growth. Section 8 concludes with lessons and recommendations for continued improvement in implementation.

Box 1: What is a process evaluation?

There are three broad types of program evaluations:

Outcome evaluations are designed to assess the extent to which an intervention achieved its desired goals. They are conducted at the close of a program. Importantly, outcome evaluations are not designed to establish causality between program activities and the outcome observed; thus, there is always the possibility that the observed outcomes are a result of factors unrelated to the program’s activities.

Impact evaluations measure the broader changes that result from program implementation. Impact evaluations allow for determination of causality; that is, they are designed in such a way that the observed outcomes can be directly and indisputably determined to be the result of the program, and not some other factor. They require a control group and relatively large sample sizes (more than 1,000 observations), and usually are conducted at the close of the program and/or a period of time after program close (normally within 6 months to 2 years), to assess longer-term impact.

A **process evaluation** assesses how an intervention is implemented so that a project team can make changes and adjustments as needed. Process evaluations focus on identifying barriers and enabling factors, and are not designed to evaluate outcomes or establish causality.

Data Sources and Methodology

The analysis presented here is drawn from a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. De-identified data on suspensions and disciplinary referrals is taken from the CCSD Infinite Campus database.

De-identified, summary data on restorative referrals and processes was provided by WDES and CMS. Both schools have built a data collection system to document restorative referrals, interventions and outcomes. This system consists of an electronic Restorative Approach Request form where teachers or administrators enter data on incidents including the people involved, type of incident, and type of restorative intervention requested. The Restorative Culture Team in each school, as they respond to each request, enters data on the type of intervention conducted, people involved (students, parents/caregivers, teachers, counselors or others), agreements reached, and whether the parties involved have kept their commitments to the agreement one month after the intervention.

The bulk of the analysis comes from 20 interviews with staff at CMS and WDES between January 25 and Feb 25, 2021. Written permission was obtained from the district via each principal to allow for interviews with staff at each school. The research team worked with principals and the Restorative Culture Leadership Team (RCLT) at each school to determine a list of interviewees that would represent a range of involvement with implementation. This includes teachers (4 at CMS, 5 at WDES), school counselors (2 at each school), and administrators (2 Principals, 2 Assistant Principals), two Restorative Coordinators and one ISS Coordinator (at CMS). The team intentionally selected staff with varying degrees of experience with RP, including more veteran teachers as well as first-year staff, in order to capture a wider set of voices.

Participation in the interview was voluntary, with verbal consent obtained at the start of each interview. Each interviewee also gave verbal consent for audio to be recorded. All were conducted via zoom and lasted between 45 minutes and one hour.

The audio recordings were transcribed and coded for main themes. Three analysts from the research team coded all transcripts separately, then triangulated the data to draw out common findings. A draft of the report was circulated to all interviewees for feedback, before preparation of final version.

II. Overview of Restorative Practices in Schools

Restorative Practices (RP) present an approach to building school culture and responding to harm in a way that embraces relationships, inclusiveness, and accountability. There is no single definition of RP; rather, programs with a restorative focus are oriented by a set of guiding principles that prioritize repairing relationships and addressing harm done over assigning blame and punishment. This flexibility is intentional and allows for schools to tailor practices to the needs of their community. RP are often combined with other non-punitive approaches to discipline, such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

The evidence base for RP is broad, now including two impact evaluations and hundreds of outcome evaluations.¹ The intended flexibility in RP implementation means that this literature is quite varied. Schools implement RP to widely varying degrees (ranging from having teachers attend a few trainings to hiring a full-time RP coordinator and integrating it into school systems). Different studies evaluate RP implementation over very different timelines, from a few months to several years. Schools also apply RP toward different intended outcomes, ranging from reducing suspensions to increasing school connectedness and improving academic performance.

One particularly problematic feature of the evaluation literature is that RP are often seen narrowly as an alternative to the exclusionary approach to student behavior taken by hundreds of U.S. schools over the past 20 years. This approach involves removing students from the learning environment through In-School Suspension (ISS), Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) or expulsion. There is now a solid body of research linking exclusionary discipline to a number of negative outcomes including diminished educational engagement,² failure to graduate,³ an increase in behavior problems throughout adolescence and adulthood,⁴ and future involvement with the criminal justice system,⁵ with no evidence of positive impact on school safety.⁶ These

¹ For a comprehensive review, see WestEd Foundation 2019. "Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Updated Research Review. San Francisco: WestEd Foundation. The report is an update of a 2016 literature review. Over 100 studies were covered for the 2016 report, and 30 additional studies were reviewed for the update.

² Noltmeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & McLaughlin, C. 2015. Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review*, 44(2), 224–240; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force Report, 2008. "Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations; Aug.

³ Acosta, J.D., M. Chinman, P. Ebener. A. Phillips, L. Xenakes and P.S. Malone "A Cluster-Randomized Trial of Restorative Practices: An Illustration to Spur High Quality Research and Evaluation. (2016). *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*. 26:4:413-30.

⁴ S.A. Hemphill, J.W. Toumbourou, T.I. Herrenkohl, B.J. McMorris & R.F. Catalano 2006. *The Effect of School Suspensions and Arrests on Subsequent Adolescent Antisocial Behavior in Australia and the United States*. 39 J. Adolescent Health 736; S.A. Hemphill, T.I. Herrenkohl, S.M. Plenty, J.W. Toumbourou, R.F. Catalano & B.J. McMorris 2012. *Pathways from School Suspension to Adolescent Nonviolent Antisocial Behavior in Students in Victoria, Australia and Washington State, United States*, 40 J. Community Psychol. 301.

⁵ A. Petrosino, S. Guckenburg and T. Fonius 2012. "Policing schools" strategies: A review of the evaluation evidence. *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation*, 8(17).

⁶ Losen, D. (Ed.). 2014. *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion (disability, equity and culture)*. New York: Teachers College Press.

practices also affect the greater school community; schools with higher suspension rates see lower test scores *overall* - both for students who are suspended and for those who are not - than schools with less punitive practices.⁷

Exclusionary discipline practices are also associated with disparities along lines of race, gender, and disability status – what is often called the “discipline gap.” A 2018 study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) using data from nearly all U.S. public schools for the 2013-14 school year, found that African American students made up 15.5 percent of all students but represented about 39 percent of students suspended from school in 2013-14 — an overrepresentation of about 23 percentage points — and that students with disabilities and male students were also disproportionately likely to be referred for behavior.⁸

It is worth noting that there is significant racial disparity within special education in U.S. public education. More specifically, there is an overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs. According to the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, students with disabilities are more than twice as likely as their peers to be suspended. Nationally, during the 2011-12 school year the out of school suspension rate of K-12 students with disabilities was twice that of students without disabilities.⁹

On the most basic level, improvements in student personal and academic achievement can be expected simply by a school moving *away* from exclusionary discipline. By this measure, there is now a solid evidence base linking the application of RP with reduced time out of the learning environment. A recent review of over 100 studies of RP in schools in the U.S. found decreases in exclusionary discipline in every empirical study reviewed,¹⁰ with some school systems seeing drops of up to 87 percent in suspensions.¹¹

However, evaluating RP as *only* an alternative to exclusionary practices is misleading. In reality, schools are applying RP to a range of desired outcomes beyond reducing suspensions. Studies have shown positive impacts on absenteeism and tardiness,¹² graduation rates,¹³ bullying and

⁷ Losen, D. (Ed.). 2014. *Op Cit.*

⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office 2018. K-12 Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys and Students with Disabilities. GAO 18-258. March. Further documentation in: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education 2016: Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings. November.

⁹ Losen, D. (Ed.) 2014. *Op Cit.*

¹⁰ WestEd Foundation 2019, *Op. Cit.*

¹¹ Baker, M. (2009). *DPS Restorative Justice Project: Year three*. Denver, CO: Denver Public School; Davis, F. 2014. “Discipline with Dignity: Oakland Classrooms try healing instead of punishment.” *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 23(1), 38-41

¹² Baker, 2009. *Op.Cit.*

¹³ Jain, S., Bassey, H., Brown, M., & Kalra, P. (2014). *Restorative justice implementation and impacts in Oakland schools* (prepared for the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education). Oakland, CA: Oakland Unified School District, Data In Action.

aggressive behavior,¹⁴ and school climate.¹⁵ Recent studies are also showing important impacts on disproportionality. A randomized control trial of 44 Pittsburgh schools documented a significant reduction in the discipline gap between African American and white students. Likewise, schools in Oakland that implemented restorative practices saw a reduction in the African American/White “discipline gap” from 25 in 2011 to 19 in 2012.¹⁶

Important gaps in the literature remain. Few studies look at the perspectives of school staff implementing RP to discern whether they feel more connected to the school, observe any changes in their relationships with students, or how RP affects their interactions with colleagues. Additionally, there is a dearth of documentation of the implementation challenges and enabling factors for RP. While the eventual outcomes seem positive, it is difficult to know what the journey to those outcomes was like and how schools could better address challenges along the way.

The sections that follow are meant to help WDES and CMS in filling some of these gaps in order to inform RP implementation. Others who are exploring RP might also find them useful.

¹⁴ West Ed Foundation 2019, *Op Cit*.

¹⁵ Augustine, C. H., Engberg, J., Grimm, G. E., Lee, E., Wang, E. L., Christianson, K., & Joseph, A. A. 2018. Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of the impact of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

¹⁶ The discipline gap is calculated as the difference in the rate of suspensions for African American students versus White students. Source: Jain et al 2014 *Op Cit*.

III. Guiding Vision for Restorative Practices

In order to analyze the implementation of RP, it is important to understand the vision each school is ultimately working toward. In the interviews, staff noted they were not only moving away from a punitive system, but toward a restorative one. Most had a similar idea of what this would look like. A reduction in suspensions was just one part of this vision. According to one WDES teacher:

**Box 3: Whit Davis
Restorative Culture Vision
Statement:**

We envision a Whit Davis that is prized for its culture of compassion and is identified by excellence in teaching and promotion of a positive and restorative culture. Whit Davis is a community that feels heard, valued, and is able to access their fullest potential. Students learn to take ownership of their actions, meet high expectations and feel safe and supported by their teachers and peers. Staff are committed to a growth mindset related to learning and behavior and demonstrate mutual respect for each other as well as their students and families. Families understand the importance and value of their involvement in the Whit Davis community and feel welcomed in our community of learning.

I just want students to have a feeling when they walk into Whit Davis, like 'I know that these teachers have my back.' I want them to know that they can go to any classroom door, and that teacher will be there for them, and that teacher will look at them the same way that they look at any student. Not like, this student gets the smile and the 'Hello,' in the cheery voice and then for this other student it's like, 'Uh oh. Here he comes.'

Similarly at CMS, a teacher spoke of a shift in social norms:

For it to have full impact, restorative needs to become the norm. So then when somebody does go ham, everybody's like, 'What are you doing? Ask for a circle!'

Part of GCC's implementation model has been to begin the work, and gain some experience of it, before developing a common vision to guide the work. Both schools started

discussing this in the first year and agreed on a vision statement only in year two (Boxes 3 and 4).

**Box 4: CMS Restorative
Culture Vision Statement:**

We are cultivating a joyful and equitable learning community that fosters, sustains, and heals relationships with self and others. Our school community is centered on dignity, empowerment, and promoting a sense of belonging for all. Within that, community members develop a deep understanding of restorative practices with true ownership and agency for all stakeholders anchored in mutual respect. To fulfill this vision, we commit to continuous, open, and transparent communication as we engage the difficult process of growth, healing, and transformation.

IV. Trends in Student Discipline in Clarke County School District

The following sections are best understood in the context of trends across the Clarke County School District during the implementation time period. Unfortunately, data for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years are highly skewed given that the pivot to virtual learning drove suspensions nearly to zero at schools across the district.

The most relevant and recent district-wide data comes from an analysis of de-identified student-level data for all K-12 schools over the period of 2014/15 school year to 2017/18.¹⁷ The study identified an overall upward trend in students being referred for discipline, with a 62 percent increase in the total number of disciplinary referrals from 6,829 in 2015 to 11,071 in 2018. Referrals were highest in the middle schools (40 percent of the total).

The overall increase in referrals came with a rise in the frequency of referrals for subjective infractions.¹⁸ In 2015, subjective offenses amounted to 36 percent of all referrals compared to 45 percent in 2018. In middle schools, nearly half of referrals were for subjective infractions; 33 percent of referrals were for incivility and 11 percent for disorderly conduct. Other categories were fighting (16 percent), and physical aggression (7 percent).

Racial disproportionality in referrals was notably high. African American students represented 80 percent of students referred for disciplinary infractions, but account for only 50 percent of the CCSD student population. African American male students experienced more referrals than any other group, accounting for 50 percent of ISS and 55 percent of OSS referrals, while comprising only 25 percent of the CCSD student population.

Finally, the study found that CCSD students were losing an increasing amount of learning time to suspension and expulsion. Over the 2015-18 period, CCSD students lost 39,000 days of instructional time. The number of days lost to suspension has risen year on year by a total of 2,135 ISS days and 1,147 OSS days between 2015-18, representing increases of 80 percent and 22 percent, respectively.

¹⁷ Welsh, R.O. 2019. *Student Discipline in Clarke County School District, Georgia: An Analysis of Trends and Disproportionalities in Disciplinary Infractions and Consequences, 2014-15 – 2017-18*. Report to the CCSD Board of Education, April.

¹⁸ Subjective infractions include student incivility, breaking classroom rules, and disorderly conduct, and accounted for an average of 40% of all infractions over the 2015-18 period. The remaining categories of infractions are: staff and student assault and property-related offenses (battery, breaking and entering, arson, bullying, computer trespass, fighting, physical aggression, threat/intimidation, larceny, vandalism, verbal aggression, sexual offenses) (33%), attendance-related infractions (15%), possession (2%) and weapons related (1%).

V. Timeline and Staff Reflections of Implementation at CMS

CMS BASELINE: prior to 2017

Over the years there had been growing recognition of the problems of inequity and disproportionality in discipline at CMS, and multiple efforts to address them. In interviews, more veteran staff said that while there were definitely punitive responses to student behavior, there was also a general philosophy of trying to engage in conversations that would get at the roots of behavior and acknowledge the emotional needs of students. A couple of staff had researched and brought in elements of RP, but uptake had been limited.

Up until the 2019-20 school year, CMS had just one School Counselor, one Behavior Specialist in the building only 2 days a week, and one Assistant Principal focused on discipline. The default response to disruptive student behavior was timing out, often by sending the child to ISS.

For the most part, ISS was designed as a punitive space. Students were not allowed to talk, and sat in desks with cubby walls that prevented them from seeing one another. They were required to stay there and finish school work, after which it was common for many to spend the rest of the time sleeping.

Before [RP implementation] it was easier to just call the office. You'd say 'so and so isn't listening,' and they'd go to ISS. And that was kind of that. The student's perspective was never really heard, or acknowledged, and nobody ever got at what the teacher may have done in that situation. It was like, we kind of freeze here, and the relationship is stuck. This thing happened, and we never fixed it.

—Teacher, CMS

The school had a demerit system to govern consequences and rewards for behavior.

Students had a starting balance of zero and could lose or gain points through merits or demerits. With more than -2 balance, students were not allowed to go outside during the weekly incentive and had to serve detention instead. The characteristics of detention varied by grade level, but generally involved a call to a caregiver/parent, and some element of contrition such as a letter of apology or commitment to change behavior.

SY 17-18 Exploring RP through Professional Learning and examining systems

At the beginning of the 2017/18 school year, there was a core group of staff and principal interested in exploring what RP could look like at CMS. School leadership and staff began to reflect together on the school's disproportionality in discipline and how it could be addressed. They decided to invest in professional learning around cultural competency in the classroom and begin to explore restorative practices.

A CMS' school counselor had studied RP intensely as part of her doctoral work. In fall 2017 she began to introduce the circle process in advisement by training teachers and developing lessons

and organized a PL with GCC. Uptake of the circle process in advisement was limited to a handful of teachers.

Following the PL, a group of CMS teachers revamped their grade level “teaming” procedure – a wrap-around support for students struggling behaviorally – to align it with more restorative principles. These took on a more collaborative problem-solving approach where the team sat in circle with the student and worked together with the student to identify strengths, challenges and a plan for making the situation better.

By the end of the year, school administration had obtained funding from the school LSGT to support implementation for the 2018/19 school year and set up a Restorative Culture Leadership Team (RCLT) to coordinate the work.

In the interviews, staff mentioned that, in those early days of implementation, RP was framed more as a set of strategies for individual teachers to deal with student behavior than a school-wide approach. Teachers felt it was helpful in talking to students and noted that “our halls sounded different.” However, the basic systems – detention, demerits, ISS – remained unchanged.

SY 2018-19 Committing to RP through intensive training, a part-time Restorative Coordinator in the building, and a stronger focus on community building

In the interviews, most staff referred to 2018/19 as year one of implementation, while recognizing that the foundations for the work had been laid over previous school years. In the summer leading up to the 2018/19 year, the RCLT received 12 hours of intensive training, developed a vision statement and set two school-wide objectives for the year, which were:

- 1) 100% of advisement classes use the circle process with fidelity and 40% of teachers use the circle process at least one time per unit; and
- 2) reduce ISS and OSS days by 30% compared to the 2017-18 school year.

The RCLT decided to spread an additional 12 hours of intensive training throughout the school year. The topics were chosen based on challenges the school was facing, including restorative mindset, responsive restorative circles, and the exploration of RP as a trauma-informed practice. Notably, the school administration took measures to ensure the trainings could be held during the school day by hiring substitutes to cover classes. RCLT also began developing circle process lessons for advisement.

It was also during this year that CMS started using community circles with staff. During summer pre-planning, all CMS staff received an introductory training in RP principles and community-building circles. The RCLT began facilitating community building circles as part of faculty meetings.

We were self-aware the entire time, that [R&P] was a half-step measure. We're trying to put some restorative edges around punitive processes, and we just have to move forward. And it's okay. I think that we are successful where we are and will continue to be successful in our growth, because we have kept this steady drumbeat.

– Teacher, CMS

CMS also invested in an RP Coordinator, contracted through GCC, who was on site three days a week. The decision was made to try to employ RP to address more serious behavior, including verbal and physical aggression. That year, 45 restorative conferences were held as a response to this kind of behavior. In addition, 40 proactive circles were held to de-escalate conflict. Another 115 circles were held to deal with conflict between teachers and students.

Staff began to examine school systems and spaces related to discipline, to see how they could be made more restorative. Detention was replaced with Reflection and Planning (R&P), and framed as an opportunity to reflect on behavior and make a plan to improve it. Students with a balance of -1 or lower were sent to R&P, and if they followed the required steps of making a plan for behavior change, they could then go outside for incentive. One teacher described this as a “half step” between a punitive system toward a more restorative system.

Also that year, the ISS room was revamped to look and feel more like a classroom. The cubbies were taken away, and desks arranged so that students faced one another instead of the wall.

Back in the day, with ISS you'd come in, you'd sit down in a cubby, facing the wall... You don't talk to anyone. You don't leave. You have timed bathroom breaks. They'd bring in sack lunch for the students. And I can remember [principal] Tad McMillan walked in one day, and he said, "I want to tear down all the walls. This is not a prison. We're going to make it a classroom environment." I was on board with it. It was like everything is changing around us, but we're kind of still stuck in the same frame of mind where you have a kid that sits in there for eight hours a day just facing a wall.

– BASE Coordinator, CMS

By the end of the 2018/19 year, there were some promising signs: 80% of advisement teachers were facilitating the circle process with fidelity; and in proactive circles, there was 90% compliance with agreements to avoid escalation of conflict.

It was clear that students were spending less time out of the learning environment for behavior issues as the year went on. Even though the total number of days lost to suspensions increased for the year compared to 2017/18, the last three months of the year saw steady decreases in days lost to both ISS and OSS. The number of suspensions in March, April and May 2019 represented the lowest monthly number of days out of school suspensions in three years. In addition, incidents of physical aggression had declined progressively throughout the year.

Disproportionality persisted as a serious problem. Black students continued to receive out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension at a rate more than seven times higher than other racial groups, despite accounting for 48 percent of the student body.

Staff perspectives on the transition

CMS teachers and counselors began to feel the transition acutely during the 2018/19 school year. There was a common consensus across all 10 staff interviewed for this report that this year was the rockiest. As a starting point, all agreed that the more punitive system they had known was not working toward the goals they wanted to achieve. However, it wasn't yet clear what a restorative school would look like, and they were getting the sense that moving in that direction was going to take a lot of work before they might start seeing change.

As a school counselor, it was a pretty smooth transition, because part of my job is to do peer mediation and group work anyway... I felt like people could actually see a little bit of the work I was already doing in the privacy of my office, because people don't always know what school counselors do... And it was easy for me to do it with kids, because I'm the helper. I'm the person you go to when you're trying to get out of trouble or stay out of trouble in the building.

— School Counselor, CMS

Counselors all said they found the RP tools intuitive and familiar, because the principles of RJ align with the principles of a number of counseling approaches – trauma-informed, group-counseling models that focus on relationships. For them, it was a matter of getting a handle on the language of RP and some of the core elements, like the talking piece and the preparation for circles. All school counselors interviewed also mentioned that the introduction of RP felt like validation of the work they had already been doing with students.

Similarly, some teachers felt they already had a mindset or general philosophy that aligned with RP. Several of these teachers said they found the adoption of RP at CMS to be validating of an approach that was already part of their way of interacting with students within their individual classrooms. Some had 'cool down corners' or other calming spaces in their classrooms. Setting up systems for restorative processes gave them something to plug into outside their rooms.

For other teachers, the transition was more challenging. A number of teachers were confronting chronic, often severe behavioral problems, and experiencing harm themselves. They were now being asked to start handling things in the classroom that they hadn't had to before, without necessarily having all the supports to do it effectively. In a sense, some felt they'd had a tool taken away without having another one fully in place. Some expressed feeling like RP had been imposed on them and had the effect of undermining their experience and authority in the classroom.

I think some teachers may have felt questioned, like, 'Are you saying that you don't believe me as a teacher? I'm having to explain myself when we're talking about a 12 or 13 year-old child?' You know, 99.9% of the time, not very many teachers have that time to antagonize a child to the level. I'm not saying that it doesn't happen. But for the majority, we're here for them. And sometimes I think teachers felt like we are being more scrutinized than the child for the behavior that is happening in the class.

—Teacher, CMS

Teachers also reflected feeling frustrated that RP felt like a further strain on their time, one that did not seem to be leading to the kind of behavior change they had hoped to see.

At the same time, community building circles for staff were just getting started, and there was still quite a way to go to build the kind of trust and support teachers felt they needed.

2019/20: Hiring a full-time Restorative Coordinator, transforming punitive practices

CMS began the 2019/20 school year with a new principal, a former AP, who set RP implementation as a top priority. The RCLT devoted 12 hours over the summer to evaluating the implementation of RP thus far, developing a vision for RP and setting objectives 2019/20 year, including:

- PBIS and Restorative Practices are aligned in 100% of PBIS initiatives
- ISS is a more restorative space.
- Staff demonstrate an increased capacity for and mindset of restorative practices.

The RCLT also recommitted to the objectives from the previous year: 1) 100% of advisement classes use the circle process with fidelity and 40% of teachers use the circle process at least one time per unit; and 2) reduce ISS and OSS days by 30% compared to 2018/19.

By the beginning of 2019/20 CMS had built a Restorative Response Team. A teacher with more than 20 years of experience at the school transitioned into the role of full time Restorative Coordinator to lead this team, which now included two GCC contractors (one there 2-3 days a week and one just 8 hours a week), as well as an intern who spent a few days a week in the building. The ISS Coordinator also received more training and coaching as part of transforming the ISS space to be more restorative.

Teachers, when they feel valued, are better able to shift into the things that are challenging to them. Restorative practices is challenging or new to them. If they have the support, then they can start making those steps but if they feel like there's not the support, then they're just frustrated with the new changes that are making their lives harder because it's not what they know.

– Teacher, CMS

CMS invested in more Tier 1 support for staff. This included training in classroom management as well as coaching to integrate circles into classes beyond advisement. At this point more and more staff were using circles for core academic classes.

Staff turnover continued to be high, and the CMS administration decided to make the most out of this challenge by hiring new more intentionally for restorative mindset. They asked each candidate about their approach to student growth and behavior and questioned them specifically about their knowledge of RP. Notably, a candidate's mindset was considered equally, if not more, important than their skill set in hiring decisions, with the idea that a person with the mindset can more easily be trained up in teaching skills than vice versa.

As we practiced the circle process with adults, I think we got a lot of buy in from some people. Adults are humans, and they're dealing with their own stuff, and they don't always feel heard and validated. So I've noticed adults were finding a lot of meaning for themselves personally with those circles.

— School Counselor, CMS

Gradually restorative circles in faculty meetings drew more interest and participation. Initially these had been held at the beginning of meeting, as a way to check in before tackling the more administrative items on the agenda. However, the circles began to drag out longer and longer as staff felt more comfortable participating, with the result that admin eventually flipped the order to allow more time for the circle process. Staff noted that

while faculty were dismissed at the usual 5pm end time, many often stayed 30-40 minutes beyond that time because they found value in the circle.

2020/21 Integrating community building within virtual learning, transformation of punitive spaces and practices, and perceptions of culture change

The delay in school opening in fall 2020 meant CMS had an extended pre-planning time during August, which they used to make deeper changes toward a more restorative school culture. During that time, the RP team developed a flow chart (Annex 4) for responding to student behavior, detailing which behaviors merit a call to an administrator (usually potential for harm to student or students) versus ones that the restorative team will handle. They led a PL to familiarize staff on the new protocol. In addition, a PL on Tier 1 intervention training was held.

During virtual learning, CMS doubled down on the advisement time as a community building opportunity. Beginning in the fall, advisement met twice a week instead of once, and teachers used circles as a chance for students to check in and connect socially:

Also during pre-planning, the Restorative Response Team and ISS Coordinator transformed the ISS space. ISS was renamed Behavior and Social Emotional Support (ie BASE) as a way of marking the transition toward a more reflective and restorative space.

We now do advisement twice a week where we used to do it once a week, and just that change of having that group of students that are constantly experiencing the circle and building that community more than one time a week has made a drastic difference. Now my students will say advisement is the only class that they're really socially connected.

—Teacher, CMS

BASE is a whole different room [than ISS was]. You've got really good furniture in there, work areas, and a timeout area where you can go sit on a couch and debrief. It's a really nice area. Teachers that I don't think may be on board with it even call it Hotel Indigo. I think is a good thing because if you put students in an area where things are nice and neat, then they're going to feel special. They're going to feel like someone cares about them.

— BASE Coordinator CMS

The administration tasked the RLCT with choosing a system or protocol they felt was punitive and suggesting ideas to make it more restorative. The team chose the demerit system and made the decision to do away with demerits altogether. In the new system, students can only earn merits, and none will be denied the chance to play outside during incentive. Teachers noted in interviews that this felt like an especially bold step, and one that caused more than a little apprehension.

When a portion of students returned to face-to-face learning in the fall, staff had the opportunity to observe how their new systems and practices might work in practice, but with a much smaller group of students. Principal Pendley remarked that with half the number of students in the building, “it was like training wheels for all our new teachers. We were able to engage in a much more comprehensive way using restorative interventions, because we were only doing it, four or five times a day instead of 10 times a day like before.”

During our second week back in face-to-face... all at once on the sixth grade hall, when I was with one of the kids, there were like three separate incidents of students who were in crisis, and who had deep needs... In each of those there was an administrator present for the student. It felt like students were being met with kindness, and that needs were being investigated.

— Teacher, CMS

Some of the COVID-19 restrictions worked in favor of the restorative approach CMS was moving toward. Student movement around the school needed to be minimized for public health reasons, which created a disincentive to pull students out of class. Arrival procedures were revised so that when students arrived, they would grab breakfast and go directly to their first period class instead of to their homeroom first, or staying in the cafeteria to eat. This provided more space and time for students to calm and prepare for learning. The COVID-19 prevention measures also encouraged more time outside, so students began to go outside once a day instead of just once a week.

It used to be a student would get suspended, then they come back and spend two days in ISS. And, you know, that's a lot. If you get suspended for three days, and then you got two days of ISS. That's five days out of school. That's a week. Now we've got it down to where you get suspended for a day, or two days, then you come back, you stay in BASE for one or two periods, and then they come in, meet with you and you're back in class once you own up to what happened and you have a conversation about it.

— BASE Coordinator, CMS

During the few weeks of face-to-face learning in fall 2020, the Restorative Response Team was able to test their 48-hour guideline for repairing harm. Rather than being held in BASE, students are supported as they de-escalate and then proceed to their next class. However, they do not return to the class they were retrieved from until reparative work is done. If teachers call the Team to retrieve

a child from their class, they are asked to participate in a circle with that child within 48 hours to address what happened and come up with a plan together.

All 10 CMS staff interviewed mentioned that they felt a clear shift in general mindset around RP in the school, and had tangible examples of change. Perhaps most notable, Assistant Principal and Principal said they responded to zero calls regarding behavior during the three-week face-to-face period in fall 2020. In addition, staff observed that students were spending much less time in BASE and out of class generally.

All 10 staff also said they noted much more buy-in among their colleagues, especially among new hires, since the administration had been intentionally recruiting candidates with restorative mindset. One teacher said they had, in previous years, felt “at odds” with other teachers when trying to build relationships with students, but that now her hallway felt very different.

Another teacher recalled a stressful moment when he felt the impulse to fall back on punitive measures but reminded himself demerits were no longer part of his toolkit:

The concern has always been that if you take that [punitive] tool away, then teachers feel powerless. It's really just a limitation of understanding what your toolset is... I had a situation where a student was just refusing to do something and ... at one point I wanted to reach for the familiar and say, “well that's a demerit.” And the moment I realized I didn't have that I was actually exhilarated because I realized the fault of my thinking versus the lack of a toolset. And so I look forward to ... us as a teaching community, exploring ways to interact and engage with students to really put the onus on them to be bigger, better person that they can be as we also explore ways that we can be bigger, better people ourselves.

All staff mentioned that students were beginning to advocate for themselves by requesting restorative processes when they needed support. Principal Pendley recalled hearing two students, who had gotten in a physical altercation and were waiting outside his office, begin a circle among themselves since “Mr. Pendley’s going to make us restore anyway.”

Staff did not pretend to claim that all their objectives had been achieved. Indeed, many said they now felt they realized better how far the school still needed to go to reach the guiding vision for restorative culture. Disproportionality remains a persistent challenge, as discussed in the following section. That said, there was a strong consensus that the school was now headed in the direction they wanted to go. In the words on one School Counselor:

While I don't know if everyone's completely on board, I think we're in a much, much, much better place than we were two years ago. Because a lot of people who just were completely against restorative practices, they're no longer at Clarke Middle. I think there's still a couple lingering, maybe they're still kind of on the fence, but I think as a collective, this is just what we do at Clarke Middle. And you know, that may sound dismissive to some people, but that's the culture that we've built in this space. And it's one I don't see going anywhere anytime soon.

VI. Timeline and Staff Reflections of Implementation at WDES

WDES Baseline

In 2017/18, WDES had one of the highest suspension rates among elementary schools in the district, with 149 days lost to OSS that year. Disproportionality was also high. African American students made up 47 percent of the student population, but 77 percent of all discipline referrals in 2017/18 school year. In comparison, white students were 33 percent of population, and 17 percent of disciplinary referrals.

Staff turnover had been high for several years running, with the school losing about 15 teachers a year. The school had also had five principals and five APs in just five years. As a result, a variety of programs had been tried and subsequently abandoned with each change in leadership. The school was facing a myriad of student behavior challenges, some quite severe. All of this was affecting staff morale.

Some of the behaviors that that teachers were seeing and dealing with were very hard to process. We had kids tearing up classrooms, literally throwing things... And what people are trying to process is the unspoken part, that people know kids are hurting when they're acting like that. And so there's the frustration of the behavior, but yet we know they're hurting, so how else are they supposed to act?

So it makes sense that our staff morale kept going down, because harm was being done and there wasn't a way to repair it. Teachers' feelings were hurt by students. Students were hurting each other. All that harm wasn't having a place to go.

—School Counselor, WDES

SY 18-19 Beginning the conversation

WDES began the 2018/19 school year with a new principal and an AP who had joined only the year before. Addressing staff turnover and student behavior was a top priority, and one of the first decisions was to hire an additional counselor, bringing the total to two in the building.

There was also a focus on building positive community via PBIS, which had begun the year before, and adopting the Responsive Classroom methodology to the morning meeting for all grades. Previously, teachers for the younger grades had been having morning meetings, but the older grades had not. The Responsive Classroom model was seen as a way to build relationships among students and between students and teachers.

A second priority was to build support for students into the morning arrival procedures. Students were coming straight off the bus to the cafeteria to eat breakfast. The energy in the cafeteria was often hectic, and somewhat chaotic, and arguments often broke out among the children, who were then expected to go straight to homeroom and be ready to learn. The decision was made

to change the arrival procedures so that students got their breakfast and then walked down to eat in their homeroom, with adults available along the way to help them settle and prepare:

I call it the red carpet. The students would come down that hallway, and you would see two counselors and an administrator before you even got to class. Everybody had to go a certain way so we would see if they were upset. We could ask, 'Do you want to talk to a counselor? You don't look as happy as you normally do.' And then we would pull them aside and the counselor would talk to them, help them calm down, or help them make a good plan for the day... We started trying to lower the overall temperature of the school by having good routines and opportunities for kids to talk while they were upset, because they brought a lot to school with them."

--Assistant Principal, WDES

Initial conversations with GCC about implementing RP began in the fall. School leadership approached the school Local School Governance Team (LSGT), who agreed to fund exploratory work for the 2018/19 year and then decide whether to move forward. That December, listening circles were held with WDES staff about the needs of the school. The feedback centered on the need to address student behavior, and the decision was made for GCC to support responsive circles. Less attention was given to building community.

By January two GCC consultants were at the school 1-2 days a week and a Restorative Culture Leadership Team (RCLT)¹⁹ had formed and began to meet on a monthly basis. However, by February 2019, several problems with implementation were already evident. The RCLT had not received significant training or been able to do strategic planning together. GCC's focus had been on responding to student behavior, but with minimal involvement of teachers and other staff. In a climate that had already seen so much turnover from leadership and staff, the instability with the GCC presence sent mixed messages about where the school was trying to go with RP. Morale continued to drop and frustration with RP was growing.

The first year was very rough. It wasn't very organized, and we were just doing some circles with some students. We had trained staff at the beginning, but we didn't develop a school improvement plan to implement restorative practices, so the first year was not as successful as last year and this year.

– Principal, WDES

By February 2019, GCC had replaced the two contractors with a more senior GCC presence in the building about 1 day a week. Together with the Restorative Culture Leadership Team, in March 2019, the GCC made a decision to slow down on the implementation of responsive circles, in order to focus more on community activities to build staff morale for the rest of the school year.

2019-20: A push toward more intentional application of RP, more stability on GCC side

The 2019/20 year saw a more intentional consolidation of RP at WDES, and many saw this as the first "real" year of implementation. During the summer of 2019, the RCLT was expanded to

¹⁹ Originally called the Core Implementation Team.

include more staff members. All team members attended 3 days of intensive training and strategic planning along with the RCLT from Clarke Central High School and some staff members from Clarke Middle School. In addition, all WDES staff received a two-hour introduction training to RP during summer pre-planning and an introduction to community-buildings.

The LSGT agreed to continue to fund the RP work, and WDES was able to have a more consistent GCC presence in the building. GCC now had two contractors at the school, one 3 days/week and the other (more senior) 8 hours/week.

The RCLT set three target objectives to guide implementation for the 2019-20 school year. These were:

1. At least 50% of homerooms will be implementing Restorative community-building circles at least 1 time per week during morning meeting.
2. At least 75% of staff will participate in the temperature check²⁰ with a resulting increase of 20% in staff morale (ending the year above 1.65)
3. Out of School Suspensions and Office referrals are reduced by 20% compared to the 2018-19 school year due to the implementation of restorative interventions and a restorative intervention referral system.

WDES also began the year with more clearly defined protocol for responding to student behavior that laid out how different behaviors would be addressed and when a restorative approach would be used (see Annex 3).

Also during this year, there was a stronger, more intentional focus on community building circles for staff. WDES began to use circles in some faculty meetings and in PLs every other month with circles facilitated by RCLT members. This served a double purpose, to apply the training the RCLT had just received, as well as build community and buy-in among staff.

Some teachers felt that if you don't suspend the student, then you're not doing anything to help. Having it all clearly laid out when you're using a restorative strategy, versus a suspension and following up with the teacher is important.

– Principal, WDES

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting shift to online learning in March 2020 disrupted RP implementation, such that Q4 data was not collected. However, the data for Q1-3 indicated the school was on target to meet or exceed its objectives. Up to March 2020, there was a 25 percent decrease in office referrals compared to the same period during the previous year, from an average of 2.44 disciplinary events per day in 2018-19 to an average of 1.83 disciplinary events per day in the first three quarters of 2019-20. This exceeded the 20 percent target set at the beginning of the year. In addition, ISS referrals went down by 51 percent over that period. Additionally, the uptake of circles for community building continued, with 48 percent of teachers using them at least once a week, just under the 50 percent target.

²⁰ WDES conducts quarterly temperature checks, consisting of asking staff to rate their morale on a scale of 0-3.

Staff perspectives on the transition at WDES

While few would argue that the former, more exclusionary system was “working” for the majority of students, the transition at WDES was not without its challenges, especially in the early days.

For some, RP fit within a general philosophy or approach they already brought to their work. As with CMS staff, counselors all said adapting to RP was mostly a matter of getting a handle on the language and some of the core elements, such as the talking piece and the preparation process for circles. Likewise, some teachers said their overall philosophy of teaching was already aligned with RP principles, and setting up restorative processes gave them something to plug into outside their classroom.

I can reflect back, that in the beginning there was a sense that [GCC] did not share those agreements with the teacher. We can't hold them accountable because we don't know. And also having those teachers inside of that circle is important. It may be during your planning period, or during specials, but the teacher has to be involved, if [the behavior] was within their classroom. If not, it won't be as impactful, because the teacher will say, 'Oh, you didn't do anything.' And that was 90% of the teachers. They'd say 'you didn't do anything, because the kid's still doing the same thing.'

—Teacher, WDES

Other teachers faced more challenges to adapting to RP. In the initial two years, GCC had not been as intentional about involving teachers in circles or communicating the resulting agreements from responsive circles to teachers. Also, because the GCC focus had been on responsive circles over community building, some teachers got the idea that RP was a way to “deal” with problem behavior. When they didn’t see change, frustration continued to build.

Going into the 2019/20 school year, some staff continued to express frustration that particular students had participated in multiple circles without showing marked behavior change. Staff

also expressed a strong desire for more parent involvement in responsive circles. During Q1, only one parent participated in a responsive circle. This improved by Q2 and 3, when 12 parents (total) participated, but there was still significant room for growth. The RCLT and GCC made a commitment to improve communication with teachers, support staff, families and administration related to responsive circles and the resulting restorative plans.

Additionally, staff saw the need to further support students, particularly those exhibiting Tier 2 and 3 behaviors, with more robust, and sometimes individualized behavior supports in order to address the roots of the behavior.

2020/21: Restorative Practices and Virtual Learning

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been immensely disruptive to the 2020/21 school year, staff at WDES said they were able to make the most of the extended pre-planning time in August 2020 to reflect upon and reorganize some of the RP work. During the summer, the administration began hiring with RP mindset as a priority. All 10 staff interviewed at WDES agreed there was much more buy-in school wide as a result.

Staff also used the extended pre-planning time to train together and streamline processes for community building and responding to student behavior. All new staff were trained introduction to RP and community building circle process. The PBIS and RP work were brought together within a broader Socioemotional Learning (SEL) committee, with the intention of building a more unified approach to school culture work.

There was more intentionality in transforming practices and physical spaces. One teacher used the pre-planning time to develop resources for community building circles (Annex 4). WDES also set up an intentional space for restorative work, called the Peace Room, modeled after the Peace Room at CMS. During Q1 all staff participated in a study of the book *Better than Carrots or Sticks*.²¹

They have social needs, and they're not getting those from, you know, the regular zooms. They're not getting those needs met because they're not in school, so having those community building circles in the morning and throughout the day helps them say 'Hey you know this is what I'm going through.' It gives those moments of just talking to their friends,"

—Teacher, WDES

We have really emphasized in interviews wanting to hear teachers mention relationship building, without us actually even asking a question about it. Instead, we've asked questions like, 'What's your approach to school discipline?' because what we want to hear is teachers who are interested in the whole child, and who understand that, if they know that you care about them, you're going to get a lot more progress with kids. They're going to respect you more, and you're going to have fewer discipline problems.

—Assistant Principal, WDES

Once virtual learning began in September 2020, staff quickly noted two important dynamics. First, disruptive student behavior was minimized on the virtual format. When students needed extra attention or redirection, it was possible to do this via GoGuardian or a private chat, and much less likely to escalate than it would in a face-to-face environment. Second, staff noted a greater need for community building circles where students could process how they were feeling. Several teachers began using community building circles over zoom, to give students a space to share how they were doing.

When some students returned to face-to-face learning in fall 2020, there were fewer students in the building. In addition, COVID-19 precautions served as strong disincentives to move students out of class. These two factors combined to encourage teachers to work more proactively with students in the classroom to both build community and address the roots of behavior challenges.

²¹ D. Smith, D.B. Fisher and N.E. Frey. 2015. *Better Than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Positive Classroom Management*. (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA).

Community building circles offered a tool for conversations about sensitive topics, as well. Three staff shared their experiences from a community building circle in art class, that began with a simple question: “What about adults would you like to understand better?” The question was only intended as a way to spark general conversation; however, coming soon after the events of Jan 6 at the US capitol, the students used the opportunity to process their observations and feelings on a much deeper level.

In the interviews for this report, all WDES staff said they felt there was now more buy-in among their colleagues since the administration has shifted toward hiring for restorative culture mindset. Newer staff interviewed said RP drew them to apply to the schools. Other teachers said they began to see tangible evidence of students benefitting from restorative responses, which contributed to greater buy-in among staff.

The original question [in the art class] was not even related to the event, but it ended up sparking a discussion on ‘why are people acting this way in this country? These adults know better.’ It turned into a really important circle dedicated to listening to students speak and air out their concerns ... We had students who were ready to create art projects and essays and to send messages out.

– School Counselor, WDES

VII. RP and Racial Disproportionality in Discipline at WDES and CMS

Racial disproportionality in discipline referrals has been a persistent challenge at both CMS and WDES, as it has across CCSD, and indeed throughout the country. Because disproportionality is part of entrenched systems of racial inequity, it requires time and intentionality to dismantle.

RP are not meant to substitute for work on equity and racial justice in schools. Rather, they can complement this work in several ways. First, by minimizing time out of the learning environment, RP can contribute to equity in instruction; as suspensions go down, students of color will spend less time out of school. Second, building restorative culture is intended to increase engagement with the school environment, an important ingredient in academic and personal success. Third, restorative practices involve a conversation around student behavior that allows for understanding *why* students are being referred. By giving students a voice in this process, it is easier to see whether/how implicit bias might be affecting teacher decisions to refer. It also gives more space for students to own problematic behavior and correct it, without losing valuable time

Unless we deal with equity issues and racial bias in conjunction with what we're trying to do with restorative practices, I think there's going to be always a disconnect.

—Teacher, WDES

The majority of the kids getting written up are African American boys by mostly younger, white female teachers... who are like, "I have to let you know that I'm the dominant person in this room." And so it becomes a confrontation of who's the most dominant person... Maybe in his neighborhood or his home, he's raising himself or doing things as an adult. Outside of school he's hanging out with the big boys and trying to help his parents out, but when he comes to school, he's talked down to. It's almost like they take that power away from him, and so now he's gonna act out because he's gonna feel like, 'Wait, you don't know my struggles. At home I have to be big, and here you talk down to me like I'm a nobody.'

—BASE Coordinator, CMS

in school.

Because of the pivot to virtual learning, there is no data on office referrals or suspensions for WDES or CMS after March 2020. Thus, it is not possible to measure quantitative differences in the application of disciplinary actions or time out of the learning environment within the past year.

In interviews, staff had a lot to say about the relationship between RP implementation and disproportionality. Without exception, all staff in both schools recognized it as a major growth area. Both schools are also implementing programs specifically focusing on equity and racial justice alongside RP.

Several staff mentioned that RP had given rise to more reflection on the factors that seemed to be driving disproportionality. About half of the staff at each school specifically noted that most teachers at their

schools are white females, while about half of the student population is African American, and pointed to cultural norms and biases feeding into student-adult interactions in the building. Without self-reflection from adults about these biases, these interactions often result in disproportionate referrals for African American students.

Some staff felt that the use of RP provided an opportunity for students and teachers to recognize their own biases and come to trust one another more. In addition, allowing for student voice in the process of addressing behavior, in theory, provides a space where teacher bias or cultural norms about what constitutes problem behavior can be interrogated.

The majority of our referrals are open to interpretation, like disrespect... That's where the circle comes in handy. Because, if you go through the circle process, you can figure out that maybe y'all had different interpretations of respect that day, whereas if you just go straight punitive, then it's not taking in that other side into account. Because maybe they felt like you disrespected them. And more often than not, that's what it is. They feel disrespected when they're not heard. Now, it may end up that we both agree that the behavior was disrespectful, but we're at least giving the space to have checks and balances.

— Teacher, CMS

Staff at both schools observed that African American students were still being referred more often than other students, but now they were going into restorative interventions as opposed to being suspended. At the end of the day, this still meant more time out of the classroom for African American students. Some saw a

If you're being suspended, that's not good. But if you're being pulled out to go to a circle all the time, that's not good either. Because you're still missing being part of your class community, and your restorative community is where you are spending your time. What we really want is for a student's community to be the classroom.

—Teacher WDES

risk that not only were these students continuing to miss instructional time, but that it could end up reinforcing the sense that they were not a full part of the classroom community.

At CMS, several continued to notice that white students were more likely to get a call or email to a parent for certain behaviors, while African American students would be referred to a responsive circle. This was contributing to a perception that community

building circles were for “all” students, while responsive circles were meant for African American students.

At present, neither school is tracking demographic indicators within the data systems on restorative practices. The district-wide Infinite Campus system records the race, ethnicity and sex of the student, which allows for looking at patterns of disciplinary suspensions and expulsions by sub-group. The restorative request forms do not record demographic data. Going forward, it will be important for both schools to look at restorative referrals, interventions and outcomes by sub-groups to understand how RP differ for students by race.

The question for me is, what behaviors are we intervening restoratively for? How are we deciding what behaviors need a restorative intervention and which ones get an email to a parent? And are those decisions based in cultural norms that aren't benefiting all of our students?

— Assistant Principal, CMS

VIII. Lessons and Recommendations

The previous sections have documented RP at CMS and WDES the first three and two years of implementation of RP, respectively. The following preliminary lessons emerge from the analysis of the interviews and are intended to inform planning for the 2021/22 school year.

Enabling factors

Consistent leadership with a clear vision for restorative culture was a critical enabling factor for implementation at both schools. Staff noted that their principals had been able to secure funding, articulate goals and objectives and take concrete steps to support staff in the transition.

It was also clear that Principals and Assistant Principals in both buildings were setting a tone for staff that restorative mindset was the norm. The RCLT and school leadership at each school

To an extraordinary degree [our principal] exhibits the sort of philosophies that we want. He's incredibly approachable. I've disagreed with him before. I've communicated that I disagreed with him before and I feel comfortable disagreeing with him... He's exemplary in exhibiting how he treats teachers, while also having conversations about how can we get other people to take this approach up to the same degree.

—Teacher, CMS

have worked to model the restorative mindset in all staff and student interactions, including by facilitating community circles for staff at faculty meetings. This had the effect of supporting staff as they learned how to use the circles and to communicate with one another in a restorative way. Both schools intentionally hired new teachers with restorative mindset by including questions in the interview process. All new staff interviewed for this report (4 total) said they had been drawn to the schools because of its use of RP. Staff felt that as a result of this, restorative mindset is becoming the norm at both schools.

Common challenges in the transition

At both schools, the initial year of exploring RP through trainings and limited implementation support brought tension and uncertainty for a number of staff. During this time there was a sense that the exclusionary system was not working, and yet the benefits of a restorative culture were not on the horizon yet. Referrals and suspensions remained high, as did teacher turnover.

Staff at both schools said that in the early phase of implementation, the focus was primarily on responding to student behavior, without sufficient support to teachers or space for community building among staff. Both schools had been facing serious problems with student behavior, and resources and staffing were far below what was needed to support students in dealing with behavior challenges. When school leaders brought RP implementation into the building, staff got the idea that RP was primarily a solution to student behavior challenges. The focus on community building was much less present. At this point, some teachers felt RP was putting a further strain on their time and energy without bringing tangible results in student behavior. In the case of

WDES, turnover on the GCC side during the first 5 months of implementation further contributed to mixed messages and instability.

Both schools faced resistance from staff, mostly teachers, during the transition. In some cases, this resistance came from a fundamental opposition to the principles of RP, and some staff did leave both schools as a result. However, in most cases resistance had more to do with not having adequate support to make the transition. Some teachers had the sense that a tool was being

Whether [staff] stay or they go, it continues to be a culture at Clarke Middle where we're holding each other accountable. Now when we see folks who are stuck in a more traditional, "It's my classroom, this is the way it's gonna run" mindset, we're not there. We don't support anyone staying there so if you're staying with us, we'll help you, but you've got to learn and you've got to work.

—Restorative Coordinator, CMS

taken away (timing a child out of class) without another set of tools being fully in place. In addition, teachers were not sufficiently involved in responsive circles for student behavior. This was a missed opportunity to repair harm done by students to teachers, and for teachers to better support students in addressing behavior challenges.

Game changers in building restorative culture

Staff spoke of specific milestones where they felt shifts toward restorative culture. These were:

1. Hiring a dedicated staff member to coordinate RP: Investing in a full-time staff member dedicated to implementation of RP enabled the transition from isolated trainings to school-wide implementation at both schools. In particular, having personnel to support students and teachers; organize, plan, facilitate and follow up on restorative interventions; engage caregivers and document outcomes alleviated the heavy time constraints of teachers and counselors.

2. Transforming physical spaces: Remodeling punitive spaces helped send a message that students were no longer being excluded from the learning environment, but instead supported in emotional regulation, repairing harm and making a plan to get back in the classroom. CMS transformed ISS from a highly restrictive and punitive environment to a space (BASE) where students feel respected and supported. Indeed, the improvements were drastic enough to earn it the nickname "Hotel Indigo." The BASE Coordinator's job has shifted from policing students to supporting them as they become more accountable for their behavior and work to repair relationships and rebuild trust.

At both schools, a number of teachers are creating "cool-down spaces" in their rooms. Staff said students have begun recognizing when they need those spaces and asking to use them. In addition, both schools now have a Peace Room set aside for restorative work.

3. Revising procedures and practices: Both schools also took a hard look at existing practices and thought creatively about how to make them more restorative. CMS staff said putting in place clearer protocols for addressing incidents of behavior and having dedicated staff (Restorative

Response Team) to respond to them felt like a real shift in the culture of the school. In addition, over the past three years, CMS has progressively reformed its system from demerits and detentions to eliminating the demerit system entirely in 2021. At WDES, outlining procedures that specify when a restorative approach is called for, and having staff in place to implement those, has contributed a sense of greater organization and stability. Both schools are now relying on restorative interventions for situations that would have resulted in suspension or exclusion in the past.

4. Stepping up community building for teachers: Placing greater focus on supporting teachers was another game-changer at both schools. Holding restorative circles at faculty meetings seemed to provide a reliable and supportive space for staff to process challenges they were experiencing, both inside and outside the classroom. It also offered a way to address conflict among staff. In addition, consistent RP professional learning has allowed staff to develop greater expertise in this area.

Promising signs of change

Staff at both schools all said they now see tangible evidence of culture change. This was manifesting in several ways. First, several staff said they felt the school now had a process for having difficult conversations. Many of those conversations were aimed at repairing harm and resolving conflict. However, an increasing number of these conversations are more proactive, aimed at simply helping students and staff practice healthy communication with one another. For example, community building circles are now being used for core academic classes at CMS, and in most of the younger grade morning meetings at WDES.

I think that there is a slow but sure change happening. I've seen kids scream at the top of their lungs, "I NEED A CIRCLE NOW!!!" And I'm like, "You're angry, but golly, instead of going ham on some kid, you're shouting at me that you need a circle." That's the dream, you know?

—Teacher, CMS

Because the school community is now more familiar with the circle process, staff said they were using it to have hard conversations around events happening in the community or the country. At CMS, when a student lost his home and multiple family members to a fire, the school community used the circle process to support students as they processed what had happened and thought of ways to support their friend, and for staff to process with one another how this was impacting them. At WDES, a community building circle in art class that began with a simple question, "What about adults do you wish you understood better?" quickly became a space for students to talk about the January 6 capitol riots.

Staff also said they felt RP was contributing to better relationships with their students. Taking the space to get to know students' perspectives, and understand what motivates or triggers them, was helpful. Some teachers also said that having the chance to articulate for students how they were impacted by disruptive behavior allowed them to be more "human" with students and understand one another better.

At CMS, all interviewees mentioned they had seen evidence of increasing student self-

[Restorative Practices] do help people reflect better on what they're doing in their class, and how they're doing it. It makes you a whole lot more aware of what's going on in your building. I think it makes you try to be more proactive than reactive to try to keep negative situations from happening... It makes the whole building more aware of how we're treating people how we're treating students as a whole, and you can't argue with that.

– Teacher, CMS

advocacy. No students were interviewed for this report, so it is not possible to gauge their perspectives directly. However, the staff interviewed said they noticed that as students gained experience with the circle process and came to trust that this way of handling communication and conflict was now the way things are done at the school, they began proactively asking for circles when they needed them. Staff saw this as promising evidence of greater socio-emotional capabilities overall.

Areas for growth

Three main areas of growth emerge from the analysis that deserve greater focus going forward:

1. **Continuing work on equity:** Both schools continue to prioritize work on equity that addresses disproportionality in discipline. There was a common perception that the over-representation of African American males, especially those with special needs, in discipline referrals within the former, more punitive system has spilled

I had an instance during in person last fall where I had two young men get in a fight at recess. And they were able to have a restorative circle and I'm not even kidding within 40 minutes, these young men were back in my class and totally fine with each other, to the point where one of the young men was offering to help the other pack up his backpack and like helping them out to the bus and they were laughing and joking. I could not believe it. I'm like, '40 minutes ago, y'all were scaring me.' – Teacher, WDES

over into the restorative system to a certain degree. The consensus seemed to be that this was a reflection of two things: lingering cultural bias in referrals, combined with the need for more intensive supports to address the structural challenges many African American students are facing both outside and inside of school that often manifest in behavior challenges in the classroom. No one had an easy answer to how these issues could be addressed, and all recognized this as part of a much longer-term school culture transformation.

2. **Addressing more intense behavioral challenges:** The data from the restorative referral databases at both schools suggests that restorative interventions are not enough in responding to students demonstrating tier 2 or tier 3 behaviors. Across both schools, when responsive circles were held and an agreement reached between the parties involved, there was compliance with the agreement a month later in 85 percent of the cases. That is, in about 85 percent of the cases a restorative intervention is sufficient to discuss the problem, agree on a way to repair harm done, and hold to that agreement. When asked about the remaining 15 percent school leadership and counselors felt that some students need a combination of interventions to fully support accountability and behavior change.

Staff also saw the need to engage parents and caregivers more intensely in supporting students, especially those with significant behavior challenges. Neither school had a strong history of bringing parents and caregivers in the building. In addition, many caregivers themselves have had negative experiences with the school environment, contributing to a reluctance to engage school staff generally. Notably, all four school counselors interviewed said they regularly engage caregivers and other community supports, and that RP had given them a process to structure this. Teachers also pointed to the need for more contact with caregivers. Some had already found Zoom technology to be a useful tool for this, because it allowed a way to meet with caregivers for whom work schedules or access to transport had previously been a barrier.

3. Developing new metrics and systems to assess progress: Measuring RP against the metrics of an exclusionary discipline system (i.e., by office referrals, suspensions and expulsions) only gives a partial picture of what is happening with students and with the school environment. Without exception, staff gave anecdotal evidence of changes they were seeing – both positive and negative – that were not being picked up by the Infinite Campus database.

Both schools have already begun to try and fill these gaps. School leadership at WDES regularly conduct “temperature checks” to gauge staff morale generally, and on specific programs. These are taken quarterly in addition to opportunities for anonymous staff feedback.

CMS has a system where teachers can keep track throughout the day of incidents around student behavior. This allows teachers and counselors to understand patterns in behavior, for example if a certain student is repeatedly getting agitated or having conflict in a particular class, or at recess.

At both schools, the GCC Restorative Approach Request Form records data from teachers or administrators on incidents including the people involved, type of incident, type of restorative intervention requested and provided, as well as follow up data on agreements reached and whether those agreements are kept 30 days out.

*The data we need to track is if Johnny had seven ISS days last year and this year he's also got seven, the data we need is, how did he respond in all of the incidents after those seven days that **didn't** get him back in ISS again? Because we do we see kids using the tools we give them in circle and through restorative interventions, but because it doesn't rise to the level of needing an adult to do anything, because they work it out on their own, we don't have any numbers on it.*

—Principal, CMS

These are important steps, but still only capture part of the story. Staff pointed out that only incidents where an adult needs to intervene are recorded at all. Cases where students work out conflict without adults, and all the ways students work toward more positive culture, don't show up in the data. Thus, existing systems are only measuring the problems, without capturing evidence on how schools are actively building a more inclusive school environment.

Recommendations for continued improvement

Going forward, staff identified five areas for continued improvement. These centered on:

1. **The need to involve more caregivers in community building and responsive circles.** As implementation of RP moves forward, there is a need to place higher priority on engaging caregivers, using technology to enable this.
2. **Increased integration of behavior interventions with restorative interventions:** When responding to student behavior challenges, some students will need more than a restorative intervention. In order to avoid a punitive response for these students, it will be important to step up coordination with school counselors and behavior specialists to ensure students can access the necessary combination and level of group or individualized behavior support.
3. **Continuing work to address racial disproportionality.** Both schools are actively engaged in equity and racial justice work and exploring how RP can best complement this. Staff spoke of the need to improve monitoring of this work, and of the RP work, by race, gender and disability status. The Infinite Campus database records information on race, sex and disability status, but is limited to recording discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions. At present the restorative intervention database created by each school does not include information by subgroup. Both schools can consider collecting this data in order to see how different sub groups are being engaged in restorative processes, and what the outcomes of this are.
4. **Continued transformation of physical spaces and practices.** In both schools, staff pointed to the revamping of physical spaces and practices as milestones in the transition away from a punitive environment toward more restorative culture. Continuous rethinking of spaces and practices with an eye toward trauma-informed restorative practice will be important.
5. **Building in metrics to assess the experiences of subgroups, and to measure positive changes.** Both schools have begun building data systems to monitor restorative interventions. These could be scaled up to better measure positive steps toward restorative culture. In addition, they could be expanded to collect data on gender, race and special education status to enable monitoring disproportionality in restorative interventions.

Annex 1: Interview Guide

Interview guide:

Thanks for speaking with us. Let me explain what we're doing with this process evaluation. Our regular program monitoring includes looking at CCSD data on discipline, such as disciplinary referrals and suspensions, to see changes/trends in discipline and behavior, but this only gives us part of a much bigger, more complicated picture. We are doing this process evaluation now to understand what implementation looks like in practice. In particular, we want to know how staff are using restorative practices (or not), the challenges they are facing and how they are dealing with those challenges (virtual learning being just one of those). We do all of this with the objective of improving implementation at WDES and CMS.

We expect this to take about 45 minutes.

Please know your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If you want to skip a question, please feel free to do so. You are also free to terminate the interview at any time if you wish. Does this sound okay?

Would it be okay if we record the interview?

Questions:

1. How has the school incorporated restorative practices into its existing discipline and school culture interventions? (Follow up questions) What kinds of practices have been added, and how have they built upon/replaced other practices? (ask about: reducing OSS/ISS, working on aggressive/disruptive behavior, building restorative culture)
2. What constraints has the work toward restorative practices faced at this school? How have these constraints been addressed?
(Follow up questions): Ask about *external* constraints (things outside RP implementation, such as staff turnover, changes in leadership/priorities at CCSD, push for testing/academic focus) and *internal* constraints (differences in buy-in, uneven application of RP within the school)?
3. How have the interventions been adapted to target the needs of different groups, particularly by race and sex/gender/gender identity? (Follow up: re-examining subjective referrals and disproportionality in discipline - is RP just used for kids of color?) What impact have you seen?
4. How has your response as a principal/AP changed to problematic student behavior (eg: aggressive and disruptive behavior?)
5. Are you seeing changes in mindset about RP among teachers, in terms of relationship building with students and response to misbehavior? If so, how?
6. School-wide, have you seen impact on school culture and student behavior? (Do you see differences in impact on students who have been part of the full implementation (ie fifth or eighth graders) versus those who are newer to it?)

7. More specifically on the above: Looking at the data we have about referrals, restorative interventions and changes in behavior, we have seen: About 85% of the time, there is compliance with the agreements generated by the restorative circles. The 15% where there isn't appear to involve a small number of students. How would you help us interpret these observations? What do you think is going on?

8. During virtual instruction, how has the school been using restorative practices either to improve the virtual experience or prepare for students' return to f2f? (ie are people using restorative circles? Is the prep for student return being done with restorative culture in mind?)

9. Any other lessons or insights?

Annex 2: Glossary of terms

Restorative Interventions Currently Being Implemented at Whit Davis and Clarke Middle Schools

- 1) **Morning Meeting Community-building Circles** - These circles are done regularly during morning meeting with the purpose of building relationships between students and teachers, as well as building a culture of respect, mutual support and inclusion.
- 2) **Staff Community-building Circles** - These circles are facilitated regularly with staff divided into groups of 10-15 staff members. The purpose of these circles is to provide a space for staff to reflect together and dialogue about their role as educators at Whit Davis.
- 3) **Classroom Circles** - These circles are facilitated with an entire class and can meet a wide range of needs - everything from welcoming a new or returning class member to processing challenges going on in the classroom and working together to resolve the situation.
- 4) **Proactive Restorative Circles** - These circles involve students (and adult supporters) and are facilitated in response to lower level conflict in order to prevent further escalation.
- 5) **Responsive Restorative Circles** - These circles involve students (and adult supporters) and are facilitated in response to verbal or physical aggression.
- 6) **Restorative Meetings** - These are facilitated meetings involving a student (or multiple students) and a teacher (or multiple teachers) to discuss challenges going on and to work together to develop a restorative plan to make the situation better.
- 7) **Intensive Support Circles** - These circles are facilitated in order to provide a space for adult supporters, family members, teachers and school staff to come together with the student to discuss strengths, challenges and a plan of support and accountability.
- 8) **Restorative Conferences** - These are facilitated meetings involving a student or multiple students, parents and school staff in response to some sort of act of harm in order to work together to develop a restorative plan to make the situation better. The key difference between a *Responsive Restorative Circle* and a *Restorative Conference* is the participation of parents in the process.

Annex 3: WDES Restorative Response to Office-referred Behavior

A Step-by-Step Guide to Responding Restoratively to Office-Referred Behavior

Whit Davis Elementary School

V.1 August, 2019

When WDES Administration receives an office referral for student behavior, *AND* they decide on a restorative pathway, the following steps will be taken:

1. If multiple students are involved, they will be brought to separate adult-supervised spaces, including the Opportunity Room and the front office.
2. Students will be given space to cool down. Our counseling team and/or behavior intervention team may be consulted regarding ideas to help the student(s) cool down and become emotionally self-regulated.
3. As students become self-regulated, someone from the Restorative Culture Team will begin the circle pre-meetings individually with each student.

Goals of Restorative Circle Pre-Meetings:

- Be curious: ask curious questions related to the incident and what was going on for the student.
- Build rapport and trust.
- Familiarize students with the process and their roles in it.
- Get commitment from the student to participate in a restorative circle in order to make things better. When there is resistance, be clear on what alternatives exist to participating in a restorative circle and present those alternatives to the student, and to the parent if needed so that they can make an informed choice.
- Give participants a chance to reflect upon and “rehearse” what they will be asked to share in Circle
 - What happened?
 - How has this affected you or others?
 - What can we do to make this situation better/repair the harm done/rebuild trust/etc.?
 - How can we prevent this from happening again?
- Identify other possible participants, important issues, or red flags
 - *Prioritize the involvement of Whit staff.* If a teacher or staff person was present for the incident, try to schedule the restorative circle at a time that the staff person can participate.
- Determine participants' capacities in order to provide accommodations (*Review IEP, BIP, consult with counseling team, behavior intervention team, etc.*)
- Address concerns or confusion

4. Once the next step in the restorative process is determined (*when the restorative circle will happen, will parents be involved, will teachers be involved, etc.*), the Restorative Culture team member will communicate the suggested next steps in the restorative process to:
 - a. The students involved
 - b. School Administration
 - c. Parents (*If the restorative circle will be happening imminently, than a parent phone call can possibly wait until the conclusion of the restorative circle so that we can report the outcome of the circle to the parent*)
 - d. Teacher(s)
5. At the agreed upon time, bring the participants together for a restorative circle.
6. Facilitate the restorative circle process, with the projected outcome being a “[Restorative Plan](#)” or set of agreements developed collaboratively by all participants in the restorative circle.
7. Invite all participants to sign the “Restorative Plan” signifying their commitment to holding up their part in the plan.
8. Share the Restorative Plan with necessary parties:
 - . School Admin
 - a. Teacher
 - b. Student Support team
 - c. Parent
 - d. Any others affected or involved in the situation that were not present
9. Ensure that the incident and restorative process have been documented in the “[WDES Restorative Approaches Request Form](#)”
10. Develop a schedule for following up with students involved to support them toward following through on their agreements.

Tiered Response for Repeated Disciplinary Incidents, for incidents that do not result in physical injury, and do not involve weapons or drugs

1. **First Office Referral as a result of physical aggression or harm:** follow the above step-by-step guide.
2. **Second Office Referral for a same behavior that led to first office referral:** follow above step-by-step guide and seek parent involvement.

Annex 4: CMS Progressive Discipline System

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION AT CMS



Note: This list is not exhaustive. Teachers who are struggling to determine the most appropriate path for responding to a behavioral concern should try de-escalation strategies in the moment, and then consult with a colleague, mentor, support staff or Admin member at their earliest convenience.