



SCHOOL of  
GRADUATE STUDIES  
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

East Tennessee State University  
Digital Commons @ East Tennessee  
State University

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Student Works

---

8-2023

## School Leader Perceptions about the Implementation and Utility of Restorative Practices

Danielle Rutig  
*East Tennessee State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Urban Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rutig, Danielle, "School Leader Perceptions about the Implementation and Utility of Restorative Practices" (2023). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 4245. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/4245>

This Dissertation - unrestricted is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact [digilib@etsu.edu](mailto:digilib@etsu.edu).

School Leader Perceptions about the Implementation and Utility of Restorative Practices

---

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

---

by

Danielle Rutig

August 2023

---

Dr. Pamela Scott, Chair

Dr. William Flora

Dr. Virginia Foley

Keywords: restorative justice, restorative practices, alternative discipline

## ABSTRACT

### School Leader Perceptions about the Implementation and Utility of Restorative Practices

by

Danielle Rutig

This phenomenological qualitative study examined school leaders' perceptions of using restorative practices within their schools. Participants included twelve school leaders who had experience with utilizing and implementing restorative practices. School leaders included: principals, assistant principals, deans, and administrative assistants. Research indicates that restorative practices are adapted to support specific school goals. Restorative practices are not practiced in isolation, as school leaders often couple restorative justice with social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and other social-emotional supports. Restorative practices are tied closely to CASEL's social emotional framework.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews using a virtual platform. Themes that emerged from the analysis of data included: (a) other staff members help support effective implementation and support of restorative practices; (b) other social-emotional supports, including trauma-informed practices support restorative practices; (c) relationships between staff and students are at the core of restorative practices; and (d) restorative practices positively influence students and the overall school climate. Restorative practices implementation and utility are informal systems influenced by the school leaders' commitment to their implementation.

Copyright 2023 by Danielle Rutig

All Rights Reserved

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated first to my Savior and sustainer Jesus. I also dedicate this work to my husband, Jonathan David. Thanks for being my biggest cheerleader and supporter for nearly 25 years day in and day out. Thank you for encouraging me on the marathon that has been my graduate studies and putting up with my crazy ideas. Thank you to my sweet sons J.D. and Benjamin. Thank you for understanding when I have had to miss a game or event because of my job or school. You make me proud and I cannot wait to see what you choose to accomplish in your academics and endeavors. To Dave and Karen Dagostino, thank you for shaping me into the woman I am today. I know you would be proud of this accomplishment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr. Scott, my dissertation chair, for all her help and support on this journey. I would also like to thank Travis Scott, my editor, who helped with all my many grammatical errors. I would also like to thank Dr. Foley and Dr. Flora for their time and support as part of the Dissertation committee. Thank you to my DNA support system, which checked in on me and supported me through this process, and even said that we would read my completed dissertation. To my sister, thank you for always being my best friend and support. Another thanks to the CHS Administration, especially Dr. Brown, who cheered me on during the weary days. Furthermore, a final thanks to Beth Roeder for seeing a leader in me before I saw it in myself.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
DEDICATION.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	10
Statement of the Problem.....	13
Significance of Study.....	13
Purpose of the Study.....	13
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Research Questions.....	14
Definition of Terms.....	15
Limitations and Delimitations.....	15
Summary.....	16
Chapter 2. Review of Literature.....	17
School Discipline.....	17
Racial and Gender Disparities in School Discipline Data.....	19
Socioeconomic Status Disparities in School Discipline Data.....	20
School Characteristics and Disproportionality.....	21
Restorative Justice Practices Conceptual Framework.....	22
Restorative Justice School Programs.....	24
Restorative Justice, a Three-Tiered System.....	27
Adverse Childhood Experiences.....	29
The Trauma-Informed Approach.....	33

Outcomes of Suspensions .....	36
Zero Tolerance Policies .....	38
Deterrence Theory .....	39
School Culture .....	40
School Climate.....	41
Relationships.....	45
Whole Child Education.....	47
Theoretical Framework: CASEL’s Social Emotional Framework .....	48
Social Emotional Learning and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports .....	51
Social Emotional Learning and Restorative Practices .....	52
Summary.....	54
Chapter 3. Methodology .....	55
Research Questions.....	55
Research Design.....	55
Site Selection .....	56
Sample.....	56
Participants.....	56
Data Collection Strategies.....	58
Data Analysis Strategies .....	58
Theoretical Framework.....	59
Assessment of Quality and Rigor .....	59
Trustworthiness.....	59
Credibility.....	60

Transferability.....	60
Dependability.....	61
Confirmability.....	61
Ethical Considerations/Researcher's Role .....	61
Summary.....	62
Chapter 4. Findings.....	63
Essential Research Question.....	63
Participants.....	63
Results.....	64
Themes.....	65
Theme 1 .....	65
Theme 2 .....	66
Theme 3 .....	68
Theme 4 .....	69
Theme 5 .....	71
School Leader's Perspective on the Impact of Restorative Practices on Students.....	73
Summary.....	75
Chapter 5. Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations .....	76
Connections to Restorative Practice and Social-Emotional Learning Theory.....	76
Summary of Findings.....	78
Research Question 1 .....	79
Research Question 2 .....	80
Research Question 3 .....	80

Recommendations for Future Practice.....	81
Recommendations for Future Research .....	82
Conclusion .....	83
References.....	84
APPENDICES .....	97
Appendix A: Recruitment Email .....	97
Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Research Questions.....	99
VITA.....	101

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Historically, school discipline measures such as out-of-school suspensions and expulsions have impacted students' education experience based on their demographic group (Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018). As early as the 1970s, The Children's Defense Fund (1975) suggested that there were varying experiences for students based on their demographic identification. Punitive discipline practices in the 1990s were a response to stopping increased drug use and gang behavior in schools and lead to an increase in exclusionary discipline practices (Skiba, 2014). Punitive school discipline became overused and created disparities in educational discipline data by suspending minority subgroups at higher rates than White students.

School discipline has been an evolutionary process over the last half century. The first major shift to modern discipline policy was when students became more empowered to exercise their rights within the school. Student rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s empowered students to openly challenge teachers and school administration (Arum, 2012). In the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of disproportionate exclusionary discipline began to utilize law enforcement citations for school discipline related incidents. In the early 1990s, there was a shift to firmer punishment within school systems (Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018). In the mid- 1990s, there was a move to create Gun Free Schools (G.F.S). The Gun Free Act (Act, 1994) strengthened exclusionary discipline practices for violations of possessing drugs or weapons and other disruptive behaviors.

Between 1973 and 2006, discipline rates increased for all students across every demographic group (Losen & Skiba, 2010). White students saw a modest increase in school suspensions at the middle school level. In the same time period suspensions for Latinx students doubled, and suspensions for Black students' tripled (Losen & Skiba, 2010). These inequities

highlighted the need for education stakeholders to change the landscape for students of color and economically disadvantaged students.

In 2014 the Department of Education moved the focus to less punitive consequences for students' behavior in their "Dear Colleague" letter (Lhamon & Samuels, 2014). The letter helped to highlight the impact of exclusionary discipline and how schools changed their discipline practices to narrow the gap in disparities (Hwang et al., 2022). By May 2015, 22 states and the District of Columbia committed to revising laws about zero tolerance offenses and worked to deemphasize the use of exclusionary school discipline (Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017). The 2015 reauthorization of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) helped establish the federal government perspective and approach on discipline. From the ESSA Act (2015) state education agencies are required to collect data on different forms of exclusionary discipline (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). State agencies received funds to support programs and activities on behavioral interventions that supported school districts in reducing the use of exclusionary discipline. (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). From this new social awareness, there was a renewed emphasis on what schools were doing to stop exclusionary practices. Restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed practices were just a few of the initiatives that schools enacted to create a more culturally responsive experience (Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017).

While most high schools in East Tennessee focus on providing a comprehensive educational program for every student, there continue to be disparities in student behavior outcomes (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). Based on data from the Tennessee State Report Card 2018- 2022, students in multiple disparity groups are at higher risk for receiving punitive consequences that include exclusion from the daily classroom curriculum (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). In the Fall of 2019, the Tennessee Department of Education

cited 25 school systems for racial disparities data from 2018 within their districts (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). These racial disparities included higher suspension rates for students with disabilities and those belonging to the Black demographic group (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). The Tennessee Department of Education citations found that the largest two districts in East Tennessee had disproportionate discipline rates. The largest disparities in these districts were with Black male students who also had a learning disability (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). According to the Tennessee Leader for Equity Playbook (2018), the Tennessee Department of Education shifted its priorities and committed to practices that have more equitable outcomes for all students. One of the priorities for the state is reducing disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates (Tennessee Leaders for Equity Playbook, 2018). According to the Tennessee state report card (2018), Black students received suspensions at a higher rate than the average for Tennessee's 2016-17 school year. Part of the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) commitment includes equity shifts that challenge the misconception that at-risk students have less structure and consistency outside of school and therefore need more exclusionary discipline measures to instill respect for school rules (Tennessee Leaders for Equity Playbook, 2018). The TDOE presents the equity mindset as acknowledging the individual, that student experiences may differ, and that those differences do not equate to student deficiencies (TN Leaders for Equity Playbook, 2018). The TDOE also concluded that restorative disciplinary practices are associated with significant reductions in suspensions and steady achievement gains (TN Leaders for Equity Playbook, 2018). The Tennessee Leader for Equity Playbook (2018) also urges school leaders to train teachers in restorative practices and align school policies to improve culture and climate.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Racial disparities in school discipline impact students' school experience, (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba, 2015; TN Department of Education, 2018). Restorative practices help to reduce exclusionary practices and help schools and districts reduce racial disparity in the use of exclusionary discipline practices. The principles and practices of restorative justice play a significant role in addressing racial disparities. The research guiding this study included an examination of school leaders' perceptions of the use of restorative practices within their schools. The essential question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders related to the implementation and utility of Restorative Practices in their schools'?

## **Significance of Study**

Federal, state, and local policies are in place to help foster similar schooling experiences no matter the school a student attends. Racial disparity can be experienced by students based on the demographic they may be a part of (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Restorative practices support students in their decision-making and impulse control rather than always assigning punitive consequences that will exclude them from the classroom. This study will add to the literature on specific restorative practices utilized and how school leaders can support implementation of restorative practices within their schools. The results of this study reveal how school leaders implement and utilize restorative practices within their schools to reduce racial disparities.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders (school administrators, principals, assistant principals, deans, and administrative assistants) who have utilized restorative practices rather than punitive discipline. *Restorative practices* will be defined as practices that do not utilize traditional exclusionary

behavior practices like school suspension. Methods of inquiry will include phenomenological reflection of discipline practices. The study may be limited to only practices used within the school systems in the East Tennessee region.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework (2020) applies a systematic approach that emphasizes the importance of an equitable learning environment and coordinates practices that enhance the student's overall learning experience. CASEL's SEL framework (2020) suggests when coordinated efforts between school, the home, and the community occur it fosters youth voice, agency, and engagement. The CASEL SEL framework (2020) promotes supportive school culture approaches to discipline and authentic family and community partnerships. The CASEL 5 part of the CASEL SEL framework addresses five broad and interrelated areas of competence. The CASEL 5 include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2020). The CASEL 5 can be taught at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across contexts. The CASEL SEL framework (2020) helps to understand what students should know and be able to do for academic success, school and civic engagement, and overall health and wellness that will lead to fulfilling careers.

### **Research Questions**

The essential question that guided this study was: What are the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders related to the implementation and utility of Restorative Practices in their schools'?

The supporting sub questions for the study included:

RQ1: What was the process used to implement restorative practices?

RQ2: What are school leader's perceptions of effective restorative practices?

RQ3: What are school leader perceptions of the effects of restorative practices with disparity subgroups?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined as they apply to this study and the reviewed literature.

- *Restorative Practices*- processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and misconduct (International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), 2012)
- *Punitive discipline*- discipline practices that provide a consequence a student must serve before they can return to the school or classroom environment (Gerlinger et al., 2021)
- *Exclusionary Practices*- discipline that removes a student from the regular learning environment by placing them in another classroom or in school suspension or out of school suspension (Gerlinger et al., 2021)

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations of the study included a focus on school leaders in East Tennessee who utilized restorative practices within their schools. The study did not include all school leaders within the educational settings at each location. Other limitations could be that the researcher is a school leader in one of the districts utilized. The study was delimited to school leaders in one state. Delimitations exist when examining the perceptions of only groups from one population. Results of the study are credible to the population examined and may not apply to all settings that utilize restorative practices.

## **Summary**

This study is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to school discipline and background of the study along with the statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definition of the terms, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter 2 contains an overview of relevant research related to school discipline and methods to support alternative discipline practices like restorative practices. Chapter 2 also contains an overview of the school-to-prison-pipeline. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, including the research questions and research design, site selection, population and sample, data collections strategies, data analysis strategies, and assessment of quality and rigor. Chapter 3 also specifies the theoretical framework associated with the research. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study in relation to the research questions. Chapter 5 provides further context and implications for practice and future studies.

## **Chapter 2. Review of Literature**

Chapter 2 contains an overview of relevant research related to restorative practices and their implementation within school settings. Chapter 2 also contains an overview of the tiered system approach to restorative practices, adverse childhood experiences, and the trauma informed approach. The theoretical framework of CASEL's Social Emotional Learning, which emphasizes serving the whole student and including restorative justice practices, is also outlined. While restorative justice encompasses an array of non-punitive discipline measures it also leans heavily on school staff understanding students. School staff who have an understanding of adverse childhood experiences and the trauma informed approach have a better understanding of how to approach students when redirecting behaviors.

### **School Discipline**

Problem student behaviors are addressed in schools through consequences including verbal reprimands, after school detention, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions and fines (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In-school suspension is a school consequence that was developed as a compromise to criticism of out-of-school suspension (Trojan, 2003). Components of in-school-suspension include a placement of students in a separate classroom away from their peers and the general education environment (Allman & Slate, 2011). A certified teacher, assistant, or combination of staff members oversee the student (Allman & Slate, 2011). In most in-school programs students work independently on teacher-assigned work (Allman & Slate, 2011). The student will spend a specified amount of time in the isolated classroom including having their lunch in isolation (Allman & Slate, 2011). Variations of the program include punitive, therapeutic, academic and individual programs (Allman & Slate, 2011). Variances can include how an individual school approaches restorative practice.

Variations among schools include interactions between staff and students (Allman & Slate, 2011). One of the largest concerns about in-school suspension is that students are still missing educational opportunities because their environment is isolated (Allman & Slate, 2011). Other concerns with in-school suspension are that the student is not able to ask questions from their teacher as needed, and they remain isolated from other students for an extended period (Allman & Slate, 2011).

Out-of-school suspensions are the one of the most commonly used disciplinary consequences for student behavior (Allman & Slate, 2011). The intention of out-of-school suspensions is to punish students and to alert parents of their behavior (Allman & Slate, 2011). The suspension of misbehaving students also protects the school and school staff by creating a cooldown period between the original incident and when the student will be back in the classroom (Allman & Slate, 2011). Out-of-school suspensions are straightforward in that they simply require the student to be absent from school for a designated period of time (Allman & Slate, 2011). An assignment to the school district's alternative education program is considered a higher-level consequence than in-school and out-of-school suspensions (Allman & Slate, 2011). According to state and federal guidelines, all school systems must provide an alternative school program (Allman & Slate, 2011). This program is considered the most restrictive environment (Allman & Slate, 2011). Over the last decade the federal government, state governments, and community organizations have called on school districts to lower their suspension rates (Dhaliwal et al., 2023).

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) conclude that a punitive school environment undermines learning. With punitive discipline outcomes there is also heightened anxiety and stress that places additional demands on the students' cognitive resources. This additional stress

drains the students' available energy to address classroom tasks. In addition to the cognitive demand Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) state that the more time students spend out of the classroom the more their connection to the school wanes both academically and socially. The distance then promotes more disengaged behaviors, truancy, anti-social behaviors, which all contribute to a widening achievement gap. The frequency of student suspensions is also linked to overall academic decline and the increased likelihood of dropping out of school. Extensive use of exclusionary discipline also undermines the overall school climate. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) suggest that extensive exclusionary discipline degrades the sense of community and makes everyone feel more threatened.

### **Racial and Gender Disparities in School Discipline Data**

Restorative justice has gained traction in the United States over the last two decades to help schools to reduce disparities in exclusionary discipline. Black students and male students are much more likely to be suspended or expelled (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Fabelo et al. (2011) found that Black students were 26.2 % more likely than White students to receive an out-of-school suspension for their first offense. Statistical comparisons of students who have been referred for discipline for similar reasons (for example, fighting) show that Black male students are more likely to receive out of school suspension than White students (Skiba et al., 2018). Skiba et al. (2000) reported that while Black students were subjected to higher rates of more severe punishments, they were referred for less serious disciplinary infractions.

White students were significantly more likely to be referred to the office for objective behaviors like smoking, leaving grounds without permission, obscene language and vandalism. In contrast Black students were more likely than White students to be referred to the office for subjective behaviors like disrespect, excessive noise, threats, and loitering. These policies also

harm Latinx and Native American students (Klevan, 2021). Latinx, American Indian, and Black students are significantly more likely than other students to be referred to school administrators for discipline (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Payne and Welch (2010) came to similar conclusions: minority students experience suspension three times more than their White counterparts. Losen (2014) also reported the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline with racial and ethnic minority students with disabilities.

Males are suspended in greater numbers than Females, and Black males are suspended more than three times as often as White males (Ispa-Landa, 2017). Males are four times as likely than females to be referred to the office and be suspended (Skiba et al., 2000). Although for all ethnic groups being Black disadvantages girls more than it does boys (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Black females are suspended six times as often as White females, and Black females represent the fastest growing population within the juvenile justice system (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Taylor and Foster (1986) reported consistent ordering in the likelihood of suspension from most to least: Black males, White males, Black females, White females. Students with disabilities and non-heterosexual youth are also at risk for disproportionate disciplinary actions (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011).

### **Socioeconomic Status Disparities in School Discipline Data**

Studies of school suspension have consistently documented disproportionality by socioeconomic status (SES) (Skiba et al., 2000). Students who are eligible for free or reduced school lunch programs are at increased risk for school suspensions (Skiba et al., 1997). Existing evidence suggests that low-SES students receive discipline at higher rates than their peers and that poverty at the student-level has been linked to increased risk for office referrals and school suspension (Petras et al., 2011). Wu et al., (1982) found that students whose fathers did not have

a full-time job were significantly more likely to be suspended than students whose fathers were employed full-time. Family characteristics such as living in a two-parent household and quality of home resources such as quiet spaces, books, and time allotted for homework also predict the likelihood of suspension (Skiba et al., 2014). Sheets (1996) reported that secondary school students in both urban and rural settings from low-income backgrounds are more likely to experience a variety of school punishments. Brantlinger (1991) found that high-income students reported receiving mild and moderate consequences like teacher reprimands and seat reassignments. Low-income students reported receiving more severe consequences like being yelled at in front of their peers and searches of their personal belongings (Brantlinger, 1991). In essence, poverty does not solely explain the rates of disparities in exclusionary discipline outcomes (Welsh & Little, 2018).

### **School Characteristics and Disproportionality**

No single factor explains the discipline disparities of Black students being disciplined at higher rates than White students as Empirical evidence indicates that student behavior, student characteristics and school-level variables all contribute to disciplinary outcomes (Welsh & Little, 2018). Several school-level variables also contribute to the rates of disparities in disciplinary outcomes. School characteristics such as demographic composition (Welch & Payne, 2010) and principal perspectives partly explain the rates and of disparities in disciplinary outcomes (Skiba et al., 2007; Welsh & Little, 2018). Variations in the attitudes of principals shape the rates of exclusionary discipline. Welsh and Little (2018) stated that principals who consider the context and have a clear philosophy that guides discipline use exclusionary practices less often than principals who strictly adhere to discipline policies. When a student misbehavior occurs it can be managed by the teacher or students and can be referred to school administrators who issue a

disciplinary outcome. Welsh and Little (2018) suggest a critical examination of disciplinary processes from infraction to administrative decision is necessary to understanding the mechanisms that contribute to discipline disparities.

### **Restorative Justice Practices Conceptual Framework**

Restorative Justice is a movement in the American school system to move away from punitive measures. These practices focus on repairing harm and giving voice to all parties involved in the violation of school rules (McCluskey et al., 2008). Restorative Justice (RJ) is a broad term encompassing an array of non-punitive, relationship-centered approaches for addressing behavior and avoiding harm of others by one's actions within the school setting (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The overall goal of these practices is to unite all stakeholders to resolve issues and build relationships rather than control student misbehavior through punitive approaches (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Moreover, RJ practices exhibit a continual community orientation that seeks to democratize school environments by equalizing the voices of students, educators, administrators, and staff in the school community (Winn, 2018). Since 2000, Restorative Justice programs have formed in 25 states and numerous institutions in Europe, Oceania, and Asia (Velez et al., 2020). Bazemore and Schiff (2005) reported 773 Restorative Justice programs across the United States. Restorative Justice has gained prominence in school and juvenile justice systems. In addition, psychologists have increasingly promoted restorative practices inside and outside schools (Velez et al., 2020). McCluskey et al. (2008) conclude that if implemented correctly, Restorative Justice could improve the school environment, enhance learning, and encourage students to become more responsible and empathetic.

Restorative justice in schools is more complex than simplified discipline practices. Pavelka (2013) described the RJ model as one that allows schools to improve school culture by

addressing disciplinary standards and creating a forum for the peaceful resolution of conflict and misbehavior. Rather than control the process, schools respond to the families and community groups willing to help address problematic behaviors (Wearmouth et al., 2007). Restorative practices allow students and staff to foster social relationships in a school community of mutual engagement (McCluskey et al., 2008). Rather than compelling students to meet expectations by rewarding desired behaviors and punishing misbehaviors, restorative approaches promote students' investment and responsibility for shared routines and norms (Klevan, 2021).

Restorative Justice emphasizes repairing harm, addressing underlying causes of conflict, and prioritizing relationship-building (Sandwick et al., 2019). The sense of belonging to or marginalization from the school community affects student participation and learning and impacts student behavior and self-perception (Wearmouth et al., 2007). Most schools adopt a continuum of RJ practices, many of which are not aimed at discipline but instead toward facilitating relational and inclusive environments (González, 2015). RJ models allow schools to improve school culture by addressing disciplinary standards and creating a forum for the peaceful resolution of conflict and misbehavior (Pavelka, 2013). RJ is designed to build an environment that helps address power and status imbalances that shape students' perspectives on the legitimacy and fairness of discipline in the school (Morrison & Vaandering 2012). RJ's basic tenets emphasize fair and collective processes, featuring nurturing, personal social-emotional growth, school-wide empathy, and resilience over imposed control (Fronius et al., 2019). These tenets underscore the importance of schools implementing discipline processes viewed as fair by students, and encouraging collective bonding of students and staff (Fronius et al., 2019).

## **Restorative Justice School Programs**

Restorative Justice encompasses many different program types. The aim of a RJ program is to prevent harmful behaviors for the expected prospect of a better future: a future of safety, trust, responsibility, and well-being of all parties involved (Lodi et al., 2021). A RJ program can involve the whole school or be used as an add-on to existing discipline approaches and philosophies (Fronius et al., 2019). Specific restorative justice practices include peacemaking, talking through conflicts and emotions, and re-entry meetings to discuss plans for changing student behavior following suspensions. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) emphasized accountability for the offender's part in the social harm caused by their actions. The accountability plan following the incident includes a plan for not repeating the incident or harm and restoring the offender to acceptance. The emphasis on the harm done is the most widely accepted principle in RJ (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Schools typically choose to integrate RJ practices as an alternative program alongside normative district-wide discipline policy (González, 2015).

Lodi et al. (2021) proposed that RJ is radically different from criminal justice. With criminal justice the violation creates guilt and requires there must be a punishment. RJ emphasizes harm reparation as a means of restoring justice and relational balance rather than punishing incorrect behavior. Lodi et al. (2021) conclude that in RJ there is an overall commitment to make “right” the wrong. RJ is respectful of all parties and people. RJ is what Lodi et al. (2021) refer to as a proactive vision. While RJ is enacted when a conflict occurs it also looks at the future development of students, their relationships, and their abilities to deal with conflict.

Educators have utilized RJ practices because many students who have been affected by exclusionary discipline reported an additional impact on their post-secondary plans (Balfanz et al., 2015). Balfanz et al. (2015) concluded that student chances of graduating decrease with each suspension in ninth grade as did the chance of enrolling and persisting in post-secondary education.

Schiff (2018) found that racial subgroups had inequitable representation in school discipline. In addition, there are high correlations between race/ethnicity and exclusionary discipline, and racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions create an increased risk of a student's later involvement in the juvenile justice system (Carr, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 2015). Researchers support that RJ could reduce disparities in school discipline by fostering relationships among students and staff (Carr, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 2015). The goal of restorative practices is to create an environment that emphasizes respect between students and staff and peer-to-peer interactions (Hantzopoulos, 2013). Studies also suggest a link between restorative approaches and improved perceptions of school climate (Acosta et al., 2019). Restorative practices positively influence how adults and students experience their schools and the social climates within them (Acosta et al., 2019). Velez et al. (2020) suggest that when RJ approaches are effectively implemented, relationships in a school become stronger.

Wearmouth et al. (2007) concluded that challenging behaviors might indicate contextual issues that need addressing at the whole-school or school-community levels. A whole school restorative justice approach prioritizes involving all participants and their relationships, including teachers and administrators (Velez et al., 2020). The schoolwide model to RJ is a preventive approach for building an interconnected school community and healthy school climate in which punishable transgressions are less common (Brown, 2017). Sometimes these punishable

transgressions can be addressed through attention to school-wide practices that affect all students (Velez et al., 2020).

The core elements of RJ used in schools included restorative circles and restorative conferences, which drew on the relational focus of RJ to build inclusive communities and established systems of reparation to address harm (Velez et al., 2020). Restorative Circles involve all parties and give each person time to share their feelings about what transpired (Velez et al., 2020). Trained staff members facilitate this practice and restorative conferences (Velez et al., 2020). In the conference, the facilitator role helps the student to express their feelings and determine how their behaviors will change in the future (Velez et al., 2020). Nearly all program descriptions discuss some restorative circles, restorative conferences, and offender-victim mediation as forms of RJ practices within the school (González, 2012). These school-wide initiatives became powerful mechanisms for learning how to correct behaviors without using punitive punishments (Velez et al., 2020). Situated learning helps empower school community members (students, staff, and administration) to reclaim accountability, respect, and support (Wearmouth et al., 2007).

Most of the exclusionary discipline debate centers around administrative discretion zero-tolerance suspensions. Payne and Welch (2010) argued that zero-tolerance policies remove the responsibility of discretion from school administrative staff. This practice leaves administrators with no choice but to assign long-term suspensions. Zero-tolerance offenses can include discipline for repeated offenses of defiance and disrupting the learning environment. Under these zero-tolerance offenses students have harsher consequences imposed upon them for recurring or cumulative offenses (Lustick, 2020). Lustick (2020) concludes that leaders have significant leeway in determining when to invoke punishment, exclusion, or dialogic approaches to

discipline. Restorative Justice practices help to reduce the uneven enforcement of exclusionary discipline. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Restorative Justice practices require that schools do not own or completely control the process but learn to be responsive to families and offer groups of support for addressing problematic student behavior (Wearmouth et al., 2007). Evidence suggests that RJ has positive effects across several outcomes; discipline, attendance, graduation, climate, and culture (Fronius et al., 2019).

### **Restorative Justice, a Three-Tiered System**

The school-wide RJ program is a tiered system approach split into preventive and responsive school actions. The tiered practices become more intensive as the levels increase. Tier 1 level- components are those practiced universally. A Tier 1 element is the school-wide practice of effective statements. These statements or personal expressions allow one to express feelings in response to others' specific positive or negative behaviors (Mirsky, 2011). Everyone in the school building, including non-instructional personnel, models Tier 1 practices for the students (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) suggest that everyone in the school utilizes these statements to foster a welcoming school environment. These questions were developed by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) (IIRP, 2012) to provide consistent follow-up for the victim in a situation. In addition, these questions help to set the stage for restorative conferencing and restorative circles to help resolve the situation without punitive measures.

For example, when working with the victim, teachers/educators may ask (IIRP, 2012):

- “What did you think when you realized what happened?” (IIRP, 2012).
- “What impact has this incident had on you and others?” (IIRP, 2012).
- “What has been the hardest thing for you?” (IIRP, 2012).

- “What do you think needs to happen to make things right?” (IIRP, 2012).

Likewise, restorative questions in response to behavior include asking the student who precipitated the event (IIRP, 2012):

- “What happened?” (IIRP, 2012).
- “What were you thinking at that time?” (IIRP, 2012).
- “What have you thought about since?” (IIRP, 2012).
- “Who has been affected by what you have done and why?” (IIRP, 2012).
- “What do you think needs to be done to make this right?” (IIRP, 2012).

These questions from the IIRP (2012) help the student to reflect on the situation and what role their actions and decisions had on another student. The final question helps to initiate follow-up actions to resolve the situation, usually through a restorative conference or circle. The trained staff member which can be administrator, teacher, or restorative staff member can help facilitate the circle or conference or arrange for the student to meet with designated restorative staff members to start those processes.

Tier 2 elements consist of talking circles or restorative circles. Lodi et al. (2021) state that restorative circles and conferences represent alternative approaches to managing student behaviors. These practices create a space for reflection and discussion. This intervention is for targeted groups of students to develop and maintain relationships, or repair harmed relationships; conducting these interventions can be a preventive or a reactionary response (Mirsky, 2011). Proactive circles are a preventive element to build trust and create shared values and understanding (Mirsky, 2011). Lodi et al. (2021) suggest that circles are best in response to address specific problems like racism or bullying in the classroom. Responsive circles manage

tension and conflict within a group and aim to repair damage (Mirsky, 2011). Restorative Circles can moderate persistent issues of repeated behaviors affecting a group (Mirsky, 2011).

Tier 3 responses are the rarest of intervention components experienced by students (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Led by a trained facilitator, a restorative conference brings together the affected parties to explore what happened and how to correct the harm done (Mirsky, 2011). Foundational pieces to the restorative conference process include interpersonal connections between the student and facilitator, structured and fair interactions, and student voice inclusion (Gregory et al., 2014).

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) include any trauma that affects a child and subsequently impacts the student's health and behavior. Traumatic life experiences, according to the National Traumatic Stress Network (Pynoos et al., 2008) include:

physical or sexual abuse, abandonment, neglect or betrayal of trust (such as abuse from a caregiver), death or loss of a loved one, a caregiver having a life-threatening illness, domestic violence, poverty, an automobile or other serious accident, bullying, a life-threatening health situation, painful medical procedures, witnessing or experiencing community violence, an incarcerated family member, life-threatening natural disasters, acts of threats or terrorism (in person or televised experiences), military combat and historical trauma (p.389)

Individuals with the most significant amount of abuse, neglect, and trauma have the worst behavioral and health outcomes (Muniz et al., 2019). Increased risk of conduct issues can connect to severe, repeated, or long-term trauma in childhood (Craig et al., 2017). Multiple traumas or trauma over a sustained period is known as complex trauma (Howard, 2013). Over

90% of juvenile offenders have experienced ACEs or maltreatment in childhood (Dierkhising et al., 2013). ACEs also increase the prevalence of students' problems like anxiety and depression. Later these experiences can manifest as externalized outcomes like aggression, violence, and delinquency (Widom, 2000). There are also lifelong implications from ACE's including an increased range of adult health problems, high-risk behaviors, and cancer (Felitti et al., 1998). In addition, individuals who experience ACEs are more likely to have a history of chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues, grade repetition, or placement in special education (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001).

Complex trauma experienced in childhood also has detrimental impacts on the brain, learning, and sociomoral development, the effects of which can last long into adulthood (Hobbs, 2019). Students who experienced ACEs may appear to deliberately misbehave in the classroom, disengage from their learning, and struggle with forming relationships with school staff and other students. In addition, exposure to trauma impacts the student's academic performance, attendance, and the likelihood of school completion (Hobbs, 2019). Trauma-affected students rarely receive adequate mental health intervention; most do not receive trauma diagnosis (Perry, 2009). When there are multiple traumas or the trauma is sustained over a long period of time it is known as complex trauma (Hobbs, 2019).

According to Felitti et al. (1998), as the number of childhood ACEs increases, so does the risk for serious health problems in adulthood. Adults who experienced trauma as children are: 15 times more likely to attempt suicide; 3 times more likely to experience depression (Felitti et al., 1998). While internalizing factors from ACEs impact the student, the school is most often impacted by externalizing outcomes.

The Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente developed the ACE checklist as a screening tool to evaluate the long-term effects of trauma's impact on severe and life-threatening ailments in adulthood (Muniz et al., 2019). The ACE questionnaire is a simple scoring system that attributes one point for each category of adverse childhood experience (Schulman & Maul, 2019). The ten questions cover different domains of trauma and refer to experiences that occurred prior to the age of 18 (Schulman & Maul, 2019). Higher scores indicate increased exposure to trauma, which have been associated with a greater risk of negative consequences (Schulman & Maul, 2019). Adults who experienced multiple ACEs were at much higher risk for negative health outcomes such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and even early death (Muniz et al., 2019).

It is unclear why some children who have experienced ACEs internalize their behaviors, and others externalize their behaviors (Muniz et al., 2019). These constructs refer to problematic outcomes that are either manifested in children's outward behavior through acting out on the external environment or problems that affect children's internal psychological environment (Muniz et al., 2019). Physically abused children exhibit more severe adverse behavioral and emotional problems than their peers who have not been physically abused (Johnson et al., 2002). In addition, physically abused children are more likely to exhibit externalized outcomes such as conduct disorder (Fisher et al., 1993).

ACE's effects are most damaging when experienced in early childhood (Hobbs, 2019). The effects of trauma on younger children (up to age five) are more long-lasting and severe than trauma experienced later in life (Ryan et al., 2018). The negative implications for early brain development for children who have experienced multiple traumas, are significant (Hobbs, 2019). The brain develops in stages from the simplest, lower section (brain stem) upward to the most

complex (limbic and cortical) systems (Perry, 2009). Higher or complex systems of the brain are dependent on regulated and developed function of the lower sections (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). These lower sections send out neuro signals to all parts of the developing brain and establish the patterns and processes of future brain development (Hobbs, 2019). Therefore, developmental damage in the early stages due to erratic care, prolonged stress, and complex trauma can send a cascade of dysfunction to all critical parts of the brain (Hobbs, 2019).

When a child experiences or witnesses a traumatic event, they look to a nurturing adult to help them make sense of their experience (Hobbs, 2019). The young brain cannot cope with this stress response on its own and needs to develop the appropriate use of regulation through nurturing guidance of an adult (Perry, 2009). Therefore, when a child has an ACE like family violence, neglect, or substance abuse, they will be subjected to the adverse effects of stress (Hobbs, 2019). Children affected by trauma sustain high levels of the stress hormone produced by the fight or flight response that can alter their brain makeup and impact overall brain tissue (Dinehart et al., 2013).

Trauma impacts students' academic performance and executive functioning related to emotional regulation and socio-moral development (Hobbs, 2019). Childhood trauma alters the baseline stress response, so a child who has experienced trauma or an ACE feel as if they are under constant threat (Perry, 2009). In a school setting this response may manifest as anger, inattention, and withdrawal. It can often be misinterpreted as insubordinate behavior if educators do not know how to respond to students with trauma (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017).

Trauma affects a student's ability or willingness to form relationships with others (Skiba et al., 2016). As a result of their previous experiences, students may not trust adults with whom they don't have relationships (Skiba et al., 2016). Individuals who have experienced trauma may

be distrustful of others which leads them to question the reliability and predictability of their relationships (Davidson, 2000). Margolin and Gordis (2003) concluded that youth who have been physically abused or exposed to violence tend to engage in less intimate peer relationships and are more avoidant, aggressive, and hostile with their peer interactions.

### **The Trauma-Informed Approach**

ACEs impact how children interact and respond with those around them in various scenarios. When schools acknowledge and prepare for these situations it is referred to as Trauma Informed Practices (TIPs). TIPs often focus on educating and empowering students, families, and schools by advocating for support, safety, and overall wellness (Perry & Daniels, 2016). Prior to 2012, trauma-informed care was only utilized in the healthcare sector.

Since 2012, trauma-informed care has become more prevalent in educational and justice settings (Abuse, 2014). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Abuse, 2014) has identified six principles of a trauma-informed approach: safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, and cultural issues. TIP is a continuum of approaches starting with being trauma aware and ending with being trauma-informed at the most comprehensive level including services like trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy (Wall et al., 2016). TIPs can be essential to students' social-emotional development, well-being, and educational success (Phifer & Hull, 2016).

Hobbs (2019) suggests that trauma-affected students need a different approach to ensure their safety and the safety of others in the classroom. TIP requires proactive rather than reactive responses for trauma-affected students who need additional support to take responsibility for their actions (De Jong & Griffiths, 2006). Proactive measures help the student before an

unwanted behavior or incident occurs, and reactive measures support the student after an incident of disruptive behavior (Phifer & Hull, 2016).

Relationships between the school staff and students help school personnel to understand and identify the student's triggers (Hobbs, 2019). Students reported multiple types of trigger factors in a trauma-related classroom incident (Hobbs, 2019). Students reported trigger types to include sights, sounds, words, and interactions in the classroom (West et al., 2014). Triggers may be predictable or unknown to school staff and students (Hobbs, 2019). Triggers may cause a student to have an outburst that can cause a disruption to the school environment (Breakwell, 1997). An outburst can be verbal, withdrawal, or an act of physical aggression against oneself or others (Breakwell, 1997). Breakwell (1997) describes a student's outburst as a five-phase occurrence. The outburst includes; the trigger phase, escalation phase, crisis phase, recovery phase, and the post-crisis depression phase (Breakwell, 1997). The key to de-escalation in a crisis is to remove the perceived threat or trigger (Hobbs, 2019). The crisis phase usually lasts 3-5 minutes, and a student must be cared for and then moved to a secure place (Hobbs, 2019). It is important that teachers and support staff recognize that the student has just been through a potential trauma response and that the student may feel physically and emotionally exhausted from the experience (Hobbs, 2019). Problem-solving discussions between school staff and the student can follow at an appropriate time into the future (Hobbs, 2019). Fostering consistency and predictability are vital in creating a school climate that minimizes triggers for trauma-affected students and fosters an overall sense of belonging (Brunzell et al., 2016).

Whole school trauma approaches are more than changed discipline responses and training teachers (Phifer & Hull, 2016). A TIP school program involves teacher practice and school-wide screenings. Implementing screening and universal practices, as well as selective and indicated

intervention programs that incorporate knowledge about trauma and are evidence informed help support a comprehensive school TIP program (Herrenkohl et al., 2019). Schools may directly provide screening and intervention services in the school or collaborate with other providers to either implement programs and services in the school or refer students for screening and services in the community (Herrenkohl et al., 2019). TIP helps all school personnel realize the impact of trauma and how to provide care for the students in their classrooms. All teachers and school leaders, regardless of the academic level or context, should expect to confront trauma issues within their school buildings (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017).

A trauma-informed-approach to care or education requires providers to acquire professional development and education on the effects of trauma. While teachers need professional development and training to understand trauma-informed practices, coupling TIP with culturally responsive practices helps mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences (Bottini et al., 2020). Culturally responsive practices tap into the cultural and contextual knowledge and experience of students as rich resources for connections to the student and school (Bottini et al., 2020). Practices and knowledge provide consistent experiences of responses to student behavior (Hobbs, 2019). Rather than ignoring what students bring to the classroom, culturally responsive practices tap into those experiences and use them to engage students. TIP "ensures that all staff realize the impact of trauma and recognize the need for trauma-informed care; this translates into skills that foster an environment responsive to the needs of trauma-exposed students" (Chafouleas et al., 2016, p.154). In both TIP and culturally responsive classrooms, reciprocal relationships are key (Te Riele, 2014). Reciprocal relationships between adults and students extend beyond the teacher and student relationship and encompass all adults in the building, including school police and security officers (Te Riele, 2014). TIPs often use

school personnel to deliver support and interventions (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). Record-Lemon and Buchanan (2017) suggest that additional support through mental health organizations and school counselors would benefit the TIP program's overall goals.

Positive student-teacher relationships are characterized by genuine and mutual respect, trust, support, understanding, and care (Te Riele, 2014). To foster these relationships, school personnel get to know their students, engage them in informal conversations, provide unconditional support and demonstrate care for more than just how they perform in the classroom and school environment (Te Riele, 2014). In addition, a positive relationship between a student and an adult within a school fosters a sense of belonging (Smyth et al., 2014). A sense of belonging is crucial for trauma-affected students (Hobbs, 2019).

### **Outcomes of Suspensions**

The goal of a suspension is twofold: to protect the school environment from unwanted behaviors and disruptions, and create a deterrent for repeated or future behavior incidents of the same nature (Hemphill et al., 2012). Hemphill et al. (2012) reported that students who experience suspension report higher instances of failed courses and decreased commitment to school success. Lower school commitment manifests as low student motivation with less willingness to complete assignments, decreased motivation for educational attainment, and thoughts of dropping out (Hemphill et al., 2012). Low school commitment has also been linked with deviant behaviors (Hemphill et al., 2012) and low school commitment and deviant behaviors are linked to increased juvenile delinquency fostering the school-to-prison pipeline (Herrenkohl et al., 2000).

Schools are required by the Federal government to analyze suspension data at the state and district levels for disproportionality. Racial disproportionality is an indicator of possible

inequitable school practices (Losen, 2011). Punitive discipline practices also impede the educational opportunities of minority students and are a risk to their civil rights (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). The United States Department of Education (2021) documented wide and persistent racial disparities in school discipline practices, including disparities of high suspension rates among Black, Latinx, and Native American students. Black male students are likely to be suspended or expelled for the same behaviors as White students may not receive suspension or expulsion for (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Fabelo et al. (2011) found that Black students were 26.2 % more likely than White students to receive an out-of-school suspension for their first offense. Statistical comparisons of students referred for discipline for similar reasons (for example, fighting) show that Black male students are more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than White students (Skiba et al., 2002). Skiba et al. (2000) reported that while Black students were subjected to higher rates of more severe punishments, they were referred for less serious disciplinary infractions.

White students were significantly more likely to be referred to the office for objective behaviors like smoking, leaving grounds without permission, obscene language, and vandalism. In contrast, Black students were more likely than White students to be referred to the office for subjective behaviors like disrespect, excessive noise, threats, and loitering. (p.16)

These policies harm Black, Latinx, and Native American students (Klevan, 2021). Black, Latinx, and Native American students are significantly more likely than other students to be referred to school administrators for discipline (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Payne and Welch (2010) concluded that minority students experience suspension three times more than their White

counterparts. Losen (2014) also reported the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline with racial and ethnic minority students with disabilities.

Males are suspended more significantly than females, and Black males are suspended more than three times as often as White males (Ispa-Landa, 2017). Males are four times as likely as females to be referred to the office and be suspended (Skiba et al., 2000). Although for all ethnic groups being Black disadvantages girls more than boys (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Black females are suspended six times as often as White females, representing the fastest-growing population within the juvenile justice system (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Taylor and Foster (1986) reported consistent ordering in the likelihood of suspension from most to least: Black males, White males, Black females, and White females. Students with disabilities and non-heterosexual youth are also at risk for disproportionate disciplinary actions (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011).

### **Zero Tolerance Policies**

Zero-tolerance policies were once thought to be the cure-all solution to youth violence within schools (Skiba, 2014). In the 1980s and 1990s, school districts began to reframe their policies to include more substantial and lengthier suspensions and expulsions for a wider array of infractions including fighting, failure to comply with dress code, and any failure to comply with requests, as simple as not completing homework (Skiba, 2014). Dhaliwal et al. (2023) posit that in the wake of the Columbine shooting and other incidents of school violence schools adopted zero-tolerance policies similar to those in the criminal justice setting. By 2001 over 80% of schools had at least one element of a zero-tolerance policy (Skiba, 2001).

Zero-tolerance practices are rooted in the broken window theory, which iterates that communities must explicitly and sternly react to minor disruptions to demonstrate that these behaviors are unacceptable (Skiba, 2014). Advocates of Zero-tolerance policies believe failure to

intervene in this way allows the cycle of disruption and violence to gain a stronghold in our schools and community (Skiba, 2014). However, Skiba (2014) concluded that long-term suspensions, expulsions, and increased use of law enforcement in the school are risk factors for adverse outcomes (Skiba, 2014).

One of the most common findings is that zero-tolerance policies have a high inconsistency rate in how and when they are used by schools (Skiba, 2014). Rates of suspensions vary among schools and districts (Skiba, 2014). Heaviside et al. (1998) concluded that only a tiny percentage of suspensions account for threatened or school violence. Skiba (2014) reported that school climate, school governance, school demographics, and principal and teacher attitudes all play a significant role in determining the rate of school discipline. Skiba and Rausch (2006) found significantly higher out-of-school suspensions and expulsion rates at schools with principals who favor a zero-tolerance approach.

### **Deterrence Theory**

Deterrence theory presents the idea that individuals are deterred from committing delinquent or criminal behaviors because of the associated consequences (Nagin, 1998). These consequences are delivered in a swift, severe fashion in hopes they will stop recurrences or deter others from engaging in similar behaviors (Nagin, 1998). Nagin (1998) suggests these consequences must encompass all who are engaged in the behaviors and if they are not immediate, they will not deter the behaviors from occurring. The experience of swift and harsh consequences is to deter the individual from committing the same or associated deviant behaviors (Nagin, 1998). School suspensions are rooted in deterrent theory (Skiba, 2014). Exclusionary discipline is implemented to prevent students from engaging in misbehavior (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Stiff penalties would deter students from engaging in those behaviors

due to awareness of the consequences (Skiba, 2014). Zero-tolerance policies are in place to deter associated behaviors like drug or weapon possession with swift mandatory expulsion (Skiba, 2014). The threat of expulsion alone is sufficiently severe to deter behaviors among most students, including those without firsthand experience (Morgan & Walker, 2012). The American Psychologist (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) found there was a benefit to removing misbehaving students showing other students that consequences will follow inappropriate behaviors. Schools with greater levels of student exclusion have poorer school climate ratings (Skiba, 2014). The APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) also concluded that exclusionary discipline policies increase the likelihood of misbehavior in students for example, students may continue to act out to incur additional suspensions.

### **School Culture**

Cookson (2017) states that a school's culture has more influence on the life and learning within the building than any other factor. This includes greater influence than any federal policies, state education department, the superintendent, local school board, principal, teachers and parents can ever have. School culture generally refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that influence how school function. This term according to Cookson (2017) also encompasses more than the concrete issues of the school like the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and the degree to which the school embraces the racial and cultural diversity. Cookson (2017) posits that a school's culture reveals its underlying ethos, unspoken assumptions, and ultimate value of relationships.

Cookson's (2017) research supports that positive school relationships build positive school culture. Elements that contribute to positive school relationships include building trust, conveying care, stimulating growth, and sharing decision making. A safe and supportive school

environment also supports culturally responsive pedagogy and practice. This pedagogy and practice recognize that students are motivated and engaged when they can relate to instructional materials and find meaning in academic tasks. Cookson (2017) concludes that when schools, families, and communities establish relational cohesion learning opportunities expand.

Cookson (2017) suggests that professional learning opportunities should be fostered to develop the relational skills that are vital to creating a positive learning environment. Cookson (2017) concludes that school leaders set the tone and should demonstrate a consistent commitment to inclusion and mutual respect. This leadership is what Cookson (2017) refers to as essential to build a positive school culture. Cookson (2017) advises schools to model and implement practices that involve the entire community in decision-making processes. Cookson (2017) states “no one in a school should feel silenced” (p.4).

### **School Climate**

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) conclude that when students feel supported and safe, they can learn. The term school climate is also used to describe the overall school environment. The overall school climate greatly affects the student’s ability to learn socially, emotional, and academic skills. The school climate also sets the tone of the school and can be seen in the physical environment, experienced during the learning process, and felt with how people interact with one another.

School climate is based on the patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. The National School Climate Center (n.d.) outlines 13 dimensions that cover all aspects of the school environment ranging from the physical and emotional support of students and staff to the physical school building. The 13

dimensions also include the relationships, engagement, and sense of belonging. Sometimes the dimensions are interchanged with conditions for learning.

The first group of dimensions from the National School Climate Center school climate are grouped under safety. These dimensions include: rules and norms; sense of physical security; and a sense of social-emotional security. To support a strong school climate school rules should be communicated explicitly (National School Climate Center, n.d.). This includes clearly communicated rules about physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing. There is also clear and consistent enforcement and norms in regards to adult intervention in these matters (National School Climate Center, n.d.). There is an overall sense that students and adults feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse, and exclusion.

The second set of dimensions are grouped under teaching and learning. As part of the dimensions, there is an overall focus on social learning. To foster a supportive school climate there should be a use of supportive teaching practices such as encouragement and constructive feedback. There should also be varied opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Risk-taking and independent thinking are supported and fostered in the classroom. The overall classroom environment also supports dialog, questioning, academic challenges, and promotes individual student support. In addition, there is also fostered opportunities for students to learn and be supported in development: effective listening skills; conflict resolution; self-reflection; emotional regulation; empathy; and personal decision making (National School Climate Center, n.d.).

The third group of The National School Climate Center (n.d.) school climates' dimensions centers around interpersonal relationships. This includes: respect for diversity; social support for adults; and social support for students. To foster an overall supportive climate the

school fosters a mutual respect for individual differences (gender, race, culture,). This respect transcends all levels of the school and is seen in student to student; adult to student; and adult to adult interactions. Overall, the school is characterized by supportive adult to student relationships. These relationships help foster high expectations for student success. In addition, there is a willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals. There is also a personal concern for students' problems. Supportive relationships also extend to supportive peer relationships. This includes a school that helps students foster friendships that helps support students with personal and academic endeavors.

The next set of domains from The National School Climate Center (n.d.) includes the institutional environment. Overall, there is a sense of school connectedness and engagement. The overarching school norms allow for a broad participation in school life. This includes opportunities for students, staff, as well as families. The physical surroundings also support the school's overall cleanliness, order, and appeal. There are also adequate and relevant materials available for instruction.

The National School Climate Center (n.d.) also addresses social media as part of the domains for school climate. To foster a supportive school climate the students should feel safe from physical harm. This includes verbal abuse, teasing, gossip, and exclusion. This includes any instances that could be carried out on an electronic device. For example, any post created by a student on a social media site like Facebook or Twitter. This social media dimension also includes email, text messaging, or posting of videos or pictures.

The final area of domains from The National School Climate Center (n.d.) deals with staff issues like leadership and professional relationships. School administrators create and communicate clear visions to help foster the overall school climate. The vision should be

accessible and supportive of school staff and their overall development as professionals. Professional relationships should be characterized by positive attitudes. Relationships among school staff should support an effective working environment and collaborative learning experience.

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) conclude that the most successful schools are intentionally organized with policies and structures in place to facilitate all areas of student learning and at the same time empower educators with opportunities to meet the individual needs of their students. The most important elements of school climate contributing to increased achievement are associated with teacher-student relationships. These relationships are characterized by warmth, acceptance, and teacher support. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) posit that schools that effectively support their students create a learning culture and climate that are responsive to the changing needs of the individual student and will propel continued positive growth.

Lodi et al. (2021) suggest that the restorative approach is one of the tools that can be considered by school leaders to encourage the development and promotion of a positive school climate. Research (Lodi et al., 2021) indicates that there were significant changes in the school climate and school safety in schools that implemented the restorative approach. It was also found that there was an overall perception by teachers and students of a better school climate, an equitable environment, safe, supportive, inclusive, and generally more improved overall environment (Lodi et al., 2021). Lodi et al. (2021) states that RJ practices and policies implemented in schools help support and facilitate a strong sense of individualism and collective coherence within the school. Lodi et al. (2021) concluded that schools and teachers reported a significantly higher degree of school connectedness when utilizing RJ. González (2012) found

that a restorative approach to the whole school helps develop a non-hierarchical relationship and promotes proactive decision making between all school members. González (2012) concludes that this helps strengthen and support a strong sense of membership.

## **Relationships**

Research from Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) concluded that educating the whole child improves school climate and supports student success. Supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults provide the foundation for healthy development and learning. Optimal brain development is fostered by the presence of warm, consistent relationships; positive experiences, and positive perceptions of those experiences. Research supports that a stable relationship with at least one committed adult can buffer the negative effects of adversity. Relationships that provide emotional security are characterized by consistent empathetic communication; modeling of productive social behaviors; and the ability to accurately perceive and respond to the student's needs. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) further connect that emotions and social relationships affect learning. Cookson (2017) states that relationships with students' matter and impact the students' overall perception of their schooling experience.

Positive relationships are characterized by Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) as trust in the teacher; positive emotions such as interest and excitement; and opening the mind to learning. Negative emotions such as fear of failure, anxiety, and self-doubt reduce the capacity of the brain to process information and learn. Environments that are relationship rich and attuned to student learning and developmental needs can buffer students' stress, foster engagement and support learning. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) conclude there are lasting effects on achievement when students feel supported at school.

Cookson (2022) states that schools are small societies. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) state the primary goal of k-12 education as the empowerment of individual students to reach their full potential. School environments that are relationship-rich and attuned to students' learning and developmental needs can offset the effects outside stressors, foster engagement, and support learning. In addition, positive school conditions and climate should feature relational trust and respect between students, staff, and parents. The continuity in relationships is reflected in the consistency in practices that leads to predictability on routines that reduce cognitive load and anxiety and support engaged learning.

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) expand the idea of strong relationships to the school and family. The stronger the relationship between school and the community the overall better academic outcomes for students. Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds embrace a philosophy of partnership with power and responsibility shared. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) recognize that when trust in a community has been violated it must be rebuilt through a proactive, authentic process that utilizes extensive listening and relationship building demonstrates educators are trustworthy.

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) state that restorative justice is an approach to dealing with conflict by identifying or naming the wrong doing, repairing the harm, and restoring relationships. Restorative discipline is built on strong relationships and relational trust. Restorative systems allow for students to reflect on their mistakes, repair the damage to the community, and get counseling when needed. Relationship and trust are supported through restorative practices including universal interventions like restorative circles, or conflict resolution strategies which are also a part of many social emotional learning programs (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018).

## **Whole Child Education**

A whole child approach in education considers a student's academic, cognitive, ethical, physical, psychological, and social-emotional development (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018). Research (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018) suggests that schools should attend to four major domains to help support student achievement, attainment, and behavior. To help support student achievement and behaviors, a positive school climate should be fostered school-wide and in classrooms. An overall positive school climate promotes solid attachments and relationships. There is an overall sense of safety, belonging, and relational trust. Promoting a positive school culture fosters trust and connections with students, staff, and families when school systems and structures are in place that demonstrate caring (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018).

The second tenant includes shaping positive student behaviors through social and emotional learning (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018). The school helps promote skills, habits, and mindsets that enable self-regulation, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and resilience. Not only does the school take action to integrate social-emotional skills they also help develop a students' overall mindsets. The whole-child approach also helps promote restorative behavioral support (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018).

The third tenant for a whole child framework develops instructional strategies that support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018). The third tenant helps connect the student experience while supporting conceptual understanding and developing the student's metacognitive abilities. Student-centered instruction and learning-to-learn strategies are hallmark practices in the classroom (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018).

The final component of a whole child framework is creating individualized supports that address students' needs, including the effects of trauma and adversity (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018). These individualized supports help enable healthy development while meeting students' needs and addressing any barriers they may have. Extended learning opportunities, coordinated services, and a tiered system support work to help meet students where they are (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey2018).

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) concluded that personalizing the educational setting to respond to individual student's interests and needs as well as their home and community context is one of the most powerful levers of change. Students at risk and attached to a school staff member can problem-solve and gain the academic support they need to succeed. The relationship between the student and staff member helps reduce the dropout risk. Students are more likely to attend and graduate from school, attach to learning, and succeed academically when they have solid supportive connections with adults. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) state that graduation rates reflect more than how many students receive a diploma yearly; they indicate which students are more likely to earn a living wage and escape poverty.

### **Theoretical Framework: CASEL's Social Emotional Framework**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and the human development process (CASEL, 2020). SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop a healthy self-identity. This self-identification helps them apply the developed attitudes as they manage emotions, work towards personal goals, show empathy towards others and establish and maintain appropriate relationships (CASEL, 2020). CASEL (2020), concluded that SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower students and adults to co-create thriving schools that foster safe

and just communities. Understanding the SEL framework helps frame the need for restorative practices within a school to support student's emotional needs as well as acknowledging any trauma they may have experienced previously.

The CASEL 5 addresses five interrelated areas of competency that can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across varying cultural contexts (CASEL, 2020). Many school districts, states, and countries have used the CASEL 5 learning standards and competencies that help support what students should know and carry out for academic success, school and community engagement, health and wellness, and fulfilling long term success (CASEL, 2020). The CASEL 5 competencies include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

The first competency, self-awareness, is the ability to understand an individual's emotions, thoughts, and values and how those thoughts and values influence their behavior across contexts (CASEL, 2020). This includes the individual's capacity to recognize one's strengths and limitations, and have a growth mindset (CASEL, 2020). Self-awareness also helps integrate personal and social identities, identify their emotions, demonstrate honesty and integrity and link their feelings, values, and thoughts including one's prejudices and biases (CASEL, 2020).

CASEL's second competency is social awareness; this is the ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others and understand the broader historical and social norms for behaviors in a variety of settings (CASEL, 2020). Social awareness also helps the individual to see other perspectives, recognize strengths in others, demonstrate empathy and concern, and understand and express gratitude (CASEL, 2020). It includes recognizing the family, school, and community resources an individual has available to them (CASEL, 2020).

Self-management is the ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations (CASEL, 2020). Self-management allows the individual to achieve goals and aspirations (CASEL, 2020). This includes the individual capacity to delay gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation to work towards personal and collective goals (CASEL, 2020). This manifests through the individual as they manage their emotions, use self-management strategies, and exhibit self-discipline and self-motivation (CASEL, 2020). The individual uses planning and organization skills to manage tasks; show courage and take initiative; and demonstrate personal and collective agency (CASEL, 2020).

Relationship skills are the ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships (CASEL, 2020). Healthy relationship skills also include the individual's skill to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups (CASEL, 2020). Navigating these settings and relationships includes the individuals' capacity to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively, and negotiate and problem solve (CASEL, 2020). As an individual works through this skill they demonstrate cultural competence, practice teamwork, resolve conflicts constructively, resist social pressure, offer support when needed, and stand up for the rights of others.

The other four CASEL competencies work in unison to establish the fifth competence of responsible decision making. Responsible decision making is the ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations (CASEL, 2020). This includes the individual's capacity to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal social and collective well-being (CASEL, 2020). Students demonstrate open mindedness and identify solutions for personal and social problems (CASEL, 2020). The student learns to make a

reasoned judgment after analyzing data, information, and facts (CASEL, 2020). Individuals anticipate and evaluate the consequences of their actions and recognize how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school (CASEL, 2020).

### **Social Emotional Learning and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) are universal approaches to school-wide discipline (Osher et al.,2010). Osher et al. (2010) describes SWPBS as school-wide systems that teach rules and functional behavioral interventions. SEL incorporates approaches emphasizing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. These approaches differ in their aims because SWPBS manages student behavior, whereas SEL develops students' assets and fosters self-discipline. SEL is a student-centered approach that develops students' capacities to regulate their behavior and build caring, engaging, and trusting relationships. SWPBS is teacher-centered in that the primary aim is to decrease problem behaviors and to develop integrated support systems for students and adults at the school, classroom, and individual students' levels. The basis of SWPBS is that by teaching and modeling positive behavior and rewarding it, both mild and severe behavior issues are reduced, and the overall school environment can be improved. Positive behavioral supports are rooted in Skinner's behavioral theory (1974). Osher et al. (2010) concluded that SWPBS procedures organize prevention around multi-tiered supports and data-based decision-making. Prevention involves teaching a standard set of behavioral expectations, acknowledging and rewarding desired behaviors, and using consistent consequences when necessary (Osher et al.,2010).

SWPBS follows a three-tiered approach. Osher et al. (2010) posits the universal level utilizes a school-wide approach, the selective level is for students who are at risk, and indicated

levels are for students who are the most chronically and intensely at risk. The greater the student's needs, the more intense and detailed the intervention needs. Classrooms in SWPBS schools have a standard set of classroom expectations posted throughout the school. Teachers develop classroom rules and enforcement systems that mimic school-wide expectations. Research attributes improvements to school-wide discipline rates, vandalism, and aggression (Osher et al., 2010).

SEL has evolved from research on prevention and resilience (Osher et al., 2010) Osher et al. (2010) suggests that the premise of SEL is building the capacities and conditions of learning. SEL helps to develop social and emotional capacities of students that help students realize discipline-focused goals like character education, responsible decision-making, and resolving conflicts appropriately. SEL plans opportunities for students to apply, practice, and further develop social, emotional, and moral competencies (Osher et al., 2010).

Effective schools foster shared values, including the overarching mission, vision, and purpose (Osher et al., 2010). These schools also prioritize promoting prosocial behaviors, providing a nurturing and caring environment. SWPBS and SEL have different program objectives. SWPBS targets data-based behaviors, while SEL focuses on self-management and relationship skills (Osher et al., 2010).

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

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) conclude that a whole-child approach to education recognizes the interrelationship between all areas of student development and then designs and aligns school policies and practices to support them. Social supports, secure relationships, educative and restorative discipline practices, and learning opportunities help to challenge students while supporting their needs. Supporting all aspects of the student's well-

being ensures that what happens at school occurs in profound, meaningful, and lasting ways. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) state that emotions and relationships strongly influence learning, a byproduct of student treatment at school. A positive and supportive school climate is the core of a successful educational experience.

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) state that learning is social, emotional, and academic. Emotional and social relationships affect learning. A student's ability to manage their emotions also influences learning. Learning to calm oneself and regulate their behaviors helps provide the foundation for learning and the ability to persist at tasks. Students' interpersonal skills, including their abilities to appropriately interact with peers and adults, resolve conflicts, and work as part of a team, all contribute to effective learning and positive life behaviors. These skills also help build on SEL tenants of empathy, self-awareness, problem-solving, and effective communication. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) support that these skills help students persist with tasks, recognize patterns, evaluate their learning, and successfully transfer these skills to increasingly complex situations.

Lodi et al. (2021) suggest that restorative practices can help support and promote SEL skills like problem-solving, emotional awareness, prosocial behaviors, and general social and interpersonal skills. Restorative practices help promote the construction of empathy as students learn to express their emotions, listen and understand the emotions of others, and reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and actions in the past and future. Developing these skills helps students to foster reflective thinking and take responsibility for their actions. González (2012) found that the whole-school restorative approach creates opportunities to increase communication and develop and improve human agency, resilience, socioemotional listening, leadership, and professional skills.

## **Summary**

Chapter 2 contains an overview of relevant research related to the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study. Chapter 2 also contains an overview of conceptual framework, restorative practices, and tiered approaches. Other important literature connections include deterrence theory, the impact adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed practices have while implementing RJ practices. Specifically outlined is the literature surrounding the disparities that have developed as a result of exclusionary discipline practices. The literature review also examines supporting the whole child through understanding adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed practices and CASEL's SEL theoretical framework. All these facets help support a comprehensive approach to discipline that leads a school to full implementation of restorative practices. Chapter 3 describes the methodology. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study in relation to the research questions. Chapter 5 provides further context and implications for practice and future studies

### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders (principals, assistant principals, deans, and administrative assistants) who have implemented restorative practices. An overview of phenomenological qualitative research, research questions, and data analysis strategies, are outlined in Chapter 3. Site selection, population, sample, data collection and assessment of quality are also addressed within Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also outlines CASEL's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework.

#### **Research Questions**

The essential question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders related to the implementation and utility of Restorative Practices in their schools'?

The supporting sub questions for the study included:

RQ1: What was the process used to implement restorative practices?

RQ2: What are school leader's perceptions of effective restorative practices?

RQ3: What are school leader perceptions of the effects of restorative practices with disparity subgroups?

#### **Research Design**

Neubauer et al. (2019) concluded phenomenological research is uniquely positioned to help researchers learn from the experiences of others. A phenomenological study is a form of qualitative research that examines individuals' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of experience—both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a blended approach that provides a detailed examination of the lived experience of a phenomenon through the participant's personal experiences and

perception of objects and events (Neubauer et al., 2019). In contrast to other approaches, in IPA, the researcher performs an active role in the interpretive process (Neubauer et al., 2019). This phenomenological qualitative study examined the perspectives of school leaders who utilized restorative practices within their schools.

### **Site Selection**

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) divides the state into three regions. In each region, there are several Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) regions. CORE teams provide embedded one-on-one support to Tennessee's school districts in implementing the department's strategic priorities. The East Tennessee CORE region serves 13 counties, including one of the largest school districts within the state. School leaders were chosen within the specific geographical regions of East Tennessee. This region was chosen due to the proximity of the researcher.

### **Sample**

Criterion for this study is leaders who have or are implementing restorative practices within the East Tennessee region. Participants were selected by determining which school leader or staff fits the criterion. Twelve school leaders were selected to help represent a variety of experiences implementing and utilizing restorative practices.

### **Participants**

A purposive sampling strategy identified school leaders who met the criterion of the study. Twelve school leaders were identified and selected for this study. Twelve participants ensured a variety of perspectives and experiences from varying school settings and educational backgrounds. All school leaders in the study met the criterion of holding an administrative role as a principal, assistant principal, dean, or administrative assistant within a school and had

utilized restorative practices at some point in their careers. Table 1 summarizes the participants' roles and years of experiences with RJ. Twelve school leaders participated in this study and the researcher incorporated a simple random sample for the school leaders. School leaders were numbered 1-12 to protect their identity. A non-probability convenience sample method was utilized based on the participants that responded to the email inquiry. This phenomenological qualitative study reviewed the perceptions of school leaders who had implemented restorative practices within their schools.

**Table 1**

*Participants Summary*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>School Setting</b>	<b>Current Job Title</b>	<b>Years of Educational Experience</b>	<b>Current or Past use of RJ Practices</b>
Participant 1	High School	Administrative Assistant	20 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 2	High School	Administrative Assistant	22 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 3	High School	Assistant Principal	10 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 4	Middle School	Executive Principal	17 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 5	High School	Assistant Principal	18 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 6	High School	Assistant Principal	25 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 7	High School	Executive Principal	22 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 8	High School	Assistant Principal	27 years	Previous Use of Practices
Participant 9	Middle School	Assistant Principal	8 years	Present Use of

				Practices
Participant 10	Middle School	Assistant Principal	6 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 11	High School	Administrative Assistant	10 years	Present Use of Practices
Participant 12	Middle School	Assistant Principal	17 years	Present Use of Practices

**Data Collection Strategies**

Data for this qualitative study was derived from interviews with twelve school leaders. Interviews are used to gain insights into a person's subjective experiences, opinions, and motivations (Busetto et al., 2020). Interviews were conducted using a virtual meeting platform, Zoom or Teams, to ensure each participant was at ease and in a comfortable environment. The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview. The researcher asked follow up questions as needed the interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

**Data Analysis Strategies**

Interviews were transcribed and members checked for accuracy. Member checking, also called respondent validation, refers to checking with study respondents to see if the responses are accurate and align with their views (Busetto et al., 2020). Respondents' feedback on any issue becomes part of the data collection and analysis.

The researcher conducted the first coding to identify themes that pertain to the school leader's perceptions of restorative practices. Busseto et al. (2020) described the next step in the process as protocols. Transcripts are coded, tagged, or labeled with one or more short descriptors of the content of a sentence or paragraph (Busetto et al., 2020). Short descriptors guided the emergence of themes, which were then documented in the interview transcripts. After examining

the themes, the researcher created a narrative to finalize themes. Finally, the researcher selected specific participant quotes to add a thick, rich description of the school leader's perceptions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

CASEL's social-emotional learning (SEL) framework (2020) applies a systematic approach that emphasizes the importance of an equitable learning environment and coordinating practices that enhance the student's overall learning experience. CASEL's SEL approach (2020) promotes coordinated efforts between the school, the home, and the community. These coordinated efforts help to support restorative justice practices in schools. When this coordination occurs, it fosters youth voice, agency, and engagement (CASEL, 2020). The CASEL SEL framework (2020) also promotes supportive school culture approaches to discipline and authentic family and community partnerships. Finally, the CASEL SEL framework helps frame the school leader's perspectives on restorative practices in their schools and their perspective on using those practices rather than punitive discipline measures. This framework was selected because understanding the SEL framework helps frame the need for restorative practices within a school to support students' emotional needs as well as acknowledging any trauma they may have experienced previously.

### **Assessment of Quality and Rigor**

#### ***Trustworthiness***

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is a set of parameters that helps others see the parameters of the researcher's work. The frameworks of quality and rigor help verify validity and reliability. Constructs help the researcher to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability within their study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

In the interviews, participants were free to share their insights regarding experiences they had while implementing and utilizing restorative practices in their schools. Participants' identities were kept confidential, which enabled participants to speak freely about their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions regarding implementing restorative practices.

### ***Credibility***

To ensure credibility, the researcher used member checking. After conducting interviews, the researcher sent a transcript of individual interviews to each participant and allowed them to review what was asked, how it was answered, and edit their responses. "Member checking of any sort should lead to trust in the researcher" (Stahl & King, 2020, p.44). Accurately portraying the responses and experiences of the participants is essential for credibility and trustworthiness in a qualitative study (Stahl & King, 2020). Member checking is critical to ensure participants' perspectives are understood and statements are factual, clear, and concise (Stahl & King, 2020). Member checking also assures that researcher bias does not play a role in data outcomes and establishes trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020). Peer debriefing with supervisory or direct personnel also provides another layer of credibility (Stahl & King, 2020). In addition to member checking a peer debriefer examined the research transcripts and the final report methodology to provide feedback, ensuring validity.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is the ability to replicate the qualitative study under different circumstances and scenarios by other researchers (Stahl & King, 2020). "Transfer is only possible when a thick description provides a rich enough portrayal of the circumstance for application to others' situations". (Stahl & King, 2020 p. 27). This research employed purposeful

sampling. The researcher selected school leaders with knowledge and experience using restorative practices within a school setting.

### ***Dependability***

Stahl and King (2020) called the study's dependability the “trust in trustworthiness” (p 27). Lincoln and Guba (1986) state that dependability is providing the same context, position, and subjects; so, another researcher could replicate the study. For this study, the researcher completed interviews and ensured the privacy of the documentation. In addition, the researcher coded each interview three times. This helped the researcher discover where answers aligned with the specific interview questions and identified emergent themes.

### ***Confirmability***

Stahl and King (2020) concluded that qualitative research is best served by the researcher's value, passion, and engagement with the research, but the researcher must monitor their influences. Reflexive auditing allows the researcher to document their engagement with their research. The researcher maintained a personal journal regarding the selection of topics and participants, the phrasing of interview questions, and coding data to ensure the research process was not the result of bias.

### **Ethical Considerations/Researcher's Role**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders (school administrators, principals, assistant principals, deans, and administrative assistants) who have utilized restorative practices rather than punitive discipline. The researcher interviewed twelve school leaders with experience implementing restorative practices. The researcher collected and analyzed data to discover themes regarding educators' perceptions of these practices.

The researcher identifies herself as an educator in the East Tennessee region and currently works in an urban school setting. The researcher's administration team works to implement restorative practices within our school in hopes of reducing discipline disparities. These personal views do create some implicit bias in the researcher. These experiences and current placement could affect the researcher's perspective. These personal biases were disclosed to other participants in the study.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 contains information about the type of research included in a phenomenological qualitative study, including methodology, data sources, research questions, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and any ethical considerations that play a role in the researcher's responsibility to conduct the research and examine the results. Chapter 3 also outlines CASEL's Social Emotional Theoretical Framework. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the research, and Chapter 5 includes discussion of the findings from the research.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

This phenomenological qualitative study examined school leaders' perceptions about the implementation and utilization of restorative practices. The research focused on twelve school leaders who had experiences with utilizing and implementing restorative practices. Data from interviews with the twelve school leaders identified perceptions about the implementation and utility of practices within their schools. A primary research question and three supporting research questions guided the study.

### **Essential Research Question**

The essential research question guiding the current study was: What are the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders related to the implementation and utility of Restorative Practices in their schools'?

The supporting sub-questions for the study included:

RQ1: What was the process used to implement restorative practices?

RQ2: What are school leader's perceptions of effective restorative practices?

RQ3: What are school leader perceptions of the effects of restorative practices with disparity subgroups?

### **Participants**

Participants agreed to participate in the study, understanding that demographic information would remain anonymous. Anonymity ensures a level of protection for the identity of the participants. This study consisted of twelve participants all of which were experienced in utilizing and implementing restorative practices. All twelve participants had varying experiences within the secondary school setting. Six of the twelve participants had experiences with restorative practices at the middle and high school levels. Three leaders had experience at the

high school level, and three only had experience with middle school. The average experience for school leaders interviewed was seventeen years, with the low end of the range being six years' experience and the most experienced school leader with a twenty-seven-year tenure. All school leaders agreed to an interview lasting thirty minutes to one hour. The researcher conducted each interview using the Microsoft TEAMS virtual platform outside of contracted hours. The interview consisted of questions regarding the utility and implementation of restorative practices.

## **Results**

Analysis of the data revealed school leader perceptions and identified themes that existed among the group of leaders. The results of the coding yielded the following themes:

- Restorative practices implementation and utility do not lend themselves to formal systems of practice but informal systems influenced by the school leaders' commitment to their implementation.
- Restorative practices utilize a variety of other staff members for effective implementation and support. Other staff includes dedicated restorative practitioners in addition to the support of school counselors.
- Other social-emotional supports, including trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, and positive behavior interventions support restorative practices.
- Relationships between staff and students are at the core of restorative practices within schools.
- School leaders' perception is that the implementation and utility of restorative practices positively influence students and the overall school climate.

## **Themes**

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the perceptions of school leaders' about implementing and utilizing restorative practices. The participants in this study had experiences of the phenomenon, making this study suitable for phenomenological inquiry. Restorative Practices are implemented to help support schools in reducing the frequency of punitive discipline consequences. Restorative Practices research supports that these practices help to reduce disparities in discipline.

### ***Theme 1***

The first theme from the data was restorative practices implementation and utility do not lend themselves to formal systems of practice, but informal systems influenced by the school leaders' commitment to their implementation. Participants who had experience using restorative practices at multiple schools referenced the differences they experienced between placements. Additionally, school leaders noted that restorative practices were implemented differently across schools within the same system. For example, Participant 2 expressed this sentiment when asked about the structures their school had in place,

Currently, I will say, we do not have at my school, we do not have a set method to the madness. We do not have set policies and procedures to follow to the restorative line there, but all of us, our teachers and counselors, and admin and social worker were well versed. Furthermore, what we do here is rooted in those practices.

Participant 4 described the process in regards to no one student or situation being alike and the systems in place needed to be flexible to meet the needs of others.

So on formalized systems, and the part that I think is challenging about restorative practice is that no one situation will be identical to another, so it needs to be responsive to

the student. So having a flow chart or a series of steps will be challenging because you must start understanding the student's story.

Participant 7 summarizes the overall systems and structures

The base of it is a lot of informal systems. We have conversations with students, and our understanding of behavior helps them empathize and realize how their actions impact others. So hopefully, that happens just like informally in classrooms. When a student's behavior has reached the level of a discipline incident, the most formal approach would be for a referral to an administrator.

A school leader's commitment to implementing restorative practices also influences commitment to their use. The school leaders with multiple school experiences that utilized and implemented restorative practices describe varying levels of commitment and varying practices. Participant 3 stated,

I think that at my previous school, we did an excellent job restructuring that whole thing. That is well done there (in regards to restorative practices utilization). At my current placement, it was kind of like a check box when I got here last year. We checked off saying that we did it but did not do it.

## ***Theme 2***

A second theme that emerged from the data was that restorative practices utilize a variety of other staff members for effective implementation and support. In addition to school counselors, there are personnel dedicated to restorative practices. All the school leaders interviewed mentioned at least one other staff member who helped implement restorative practices. For example, Participants 1 and 4 utilized the school counselor to help address social-emotional needs they may not feel equipped to deal with independently. Participant 4 stated,

I always ask them to have a school counselor available or present when talking to a student. Moreover, that does put a little extra burden on our school counselors.

Nevertheless, I think they appreciate it because if an administrator thinks the conversation will get to an area where the child needs emotional support, we will tag the expert every time. Sometimes we will even start with the counselor.

Participant 9 attributed the start of their restorative practices to a counseling initiative; counselors now have a more minor role than at the program's start. Participant 2 referenced utilizing the social worker as part of their support staff.

All the other participants referenced roles that included restorative liaisons and restorative interventionists. Participant 6 described the interventionist as:

"Someone who works out in the building with students and teachers and situations. The interventionist works to help repair relationships. They can monitor students and hold restorative conversations between two students, a group, or the student and a teacher."

Participant 6 iterated that the liaison monitors the systems in place while monitoring discipline data for trends and disparities within subgroups. Participant 7 shared that the only people formally trained on practices were themselves, one assistant principal, the restorative interventionist, and the restorative liaison.

All school leaders felt that the additional staff members helped support the school systems and structures for restorative practice implementation. Five school leaders reported that the restorative staff conducted most of the restorative conversations. Participant 5 attributed positive success to the restorative support staff

I think that in our case, we have a fantastic restorative team, and that helps our school climate because, as I said, trust is a big deal. I feel that our staff trust our team, and they trust that they are trying to help the kids.

Participant 6 utilized restorative staff to help support classroom needs and establish classroom norms aligned with schoolwide expectations.

Our liaison can go in and out many times and will work with the teacher on things like just observing that classroom, and then we can make some suggestions about, well, have you thought about this? There are no ties to punishment or evaluation; we want to help.

One of the primary responsibilities of the support staff was to engage in what Participants referred to as restorative conferences. The restorative conference was the only practice all twelve participants referenced. Almost all participants utilized their restorative interventionist to support the restorative conference. Participant 7 summarized this process

The majority of what we do is just having those conferences, having conversations, getting two individuals or a group of individuals together again, just to allow them that space to talk and to speak freely and to let others know how they feel. So, we can see how that's impacted each other.

Participant 10 described the restorative conference, “the idea is that we come to a common ground in these conversations that we own our piece of the misunderstanding or frustration or argument was and we tried to hear the other person's perspective”

### ***Theme 3***

Other social-emotional supports, including trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, and positive behavior interventions, support restorative practices. Participants 2, 8, and 9 connected restorative and trauma-informed practices (TIP). Participant 2 shared,

"We do trauma-informed training, and practices; knowing the background of our school, we have many students with trauma that come to us. We are treating the why first. And then once we figure out the why, we're going at the why. We will sacrifice to make sure we understand the why."

Participant 6 specified that their implementation of restorative measures linked to social-emotional learning. Participant 3 connected social-emotional learning to adults modeling the desired behaviors. "I think modeling is perfect not only for social-emotional learning but for students' confidence because many times it goes back to students thinking that their teachers and administrative staff, everyone is there to support." Participant 9 utilized PBIS along with restorative practices. With the integration of PBIS, the school leveraged rewarding desired behaviors, and attributes like attendance and grades. The extrinsic rewards helped ensure that a variety of students had an opportunity to participate in incentive programs and encouraged the use of restorative practices in future situations. Participant 4 also mentioned programs like Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) training and de-escalation training through Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI).

#### ***Theme 4***

Across all participants' interviews was the importance of building relationships with the students. The central theme that emerged was that restorative practices were grounded in the school leaders' commitment to fostering relationships with the school staff and students. The social-emotional ties to Restorative Practice include fostering relationships within the school building. Participant 6 stated,

It is a beautiful thing when you kind of step back because I'm a parent too, but it's different when you're at home with your kid because you have high expectations just like these

parents have high expectations, but when they come in and they feel it's a safe and supportive environment, then it can turn into something where again, we're giving that student that control, that power that, you know, they're listening to me.

The goal is for every student to have one trusted adult they can go to when they face adversity, need support, or want someone to celebrate them. Participant 6 stated, "The relationship was how you got the student to buy into what you were pushing." All participants identified that fostering relationships with students and staff was crucial for effective Restorative Practices and program implementation. Relationships included creating safe spaces where students could admit wrongdoing without fear of admonishment. The relationship component was an instrumental part of the culture within the school. Participant 5 stated, "That we (school staff) have that at the school, that the students have a person, some of the kids that don't normally have people now have people". Intentionally planning for restorative practices allowed time and opportunities for students and staff to get to know each other. Participant 8 stated that by fostering relationships between students and staff, the students would proactively report incidents that would allow for the utilization of restorative practices proactively rather than reactively. Participant 8 shared

I felt like kids would come and tell us things that before they never would have told the principal but now, I feel like its students feel like they have a place. I mean, can that they can come and say that I heard this and they know I'm not going to blame them and they know that I'm going to trouble for that. They know that we're just trying to keep everybody safe think helped in terms of keeping it from getting bigger and bigger than it was then. It may have been. So, I do think that's a big help from their restorative side.

All participants agreed that relationships were instrumental in discipline follow-up. While some situations still warrant a consequence, the relationship with the staff member helped the student understand that this was a by-product of their choice rather than reflective of who the student is. Participant 11 shared "It creates a more positive school environment through the relationship building, the trust factor, getting to know your students on a little bit more personal, all of that". When there was a solid relationship, Participant 6 emphasized that there could be "repair rather than retribution." Repair allowed for individual reflection and restorative meetings rather than constant punitive consequences.

Relationships were open beyond the student and school relationship. Relationships encompassed the student's families and the community as a whole. While there were varying degrees of community involvement, Participant 12 had experience with community meetings that built relationships with the community. It helped foster restorative practices there and in the school buildings in their district. Across all interviews, there were efforts to foster relationships amongst the parents of students utilizing restorative practices. The relationships garnered support for the methods in place as the Participants' stated relationships were to the benefit of their student.

### ***Theme 5***

The final theme from the school leaders was general positivity regarding the impact of restorative practices. School leaders' perceptions were that the implementation and utility of restorative practices positively influence students and the overall school climate. Participant 7 referenced an overall decrease in discipline referrals and a decrease in their disparity subgroups due to the restorative team, program, and practices they had in place. Participant 7 stated

If I look at, you know, our data this year and knowing that our numbers are decreasing across the board with suspensions, our inequities and suspensions have gone down. Our total discipline incidents have gone down. So, I do think when it's done with fidelity, I think it (restorative practices) can have a major impact.

Participants 4 and 8 stated that the impact of restorative programs was the most beneficial to the students—especially students who often struggle with behavior-related conduct incidents. Participants 1,2,9 and 10 also shared that there had to be some intentional mind shifts of the staff concerning the perception of restorative practices instead of traditional behavioral consequences.

Restorative Practices require training for all staff. All participants shared varying degrees of implementation and training practices. Participant 12 had a great deal of experience with implementation and was working towards retraining staff throughout their district. Participant 12 called on teacher leadership to help support this retraining as it fostered buy-in. Part of this retraining was gathering school input with successful implementation to help inform the next steps for schools about to begin the process. Participant 6 had built their program from the ground up within an academy structure within their school. Their program's success garnered the attention that led to the model for districtwide practices. Although, at first, there was flexible implementation, they worked on their programming while reading through research from other districts already implementing it. These examples garnered more flexibility as they transitioned to District level implementation. A common thread of implementation and training voiced by all participants was the teachers' turnover rate's impact on the process. Participant 11 shared

The biggest challenge, I would just say staff buy in. But with that, also professional development. Continual professional development for the teachers in high school, the turnover rate is pretty high, pretty much at every high school I've ever worked at. So, making sure that

these new teachers are getting the proper training and experience with that. I would like to see this kind of program stressed in teacher programs.

There was also a joint agreement that there had been some erosion from the original implementation to what was now in place due to attrition rates. The Participants also concurred that an effective training process was onboarding for new teachers. Participant 11 reiterated, "So make sure these new teachers get the proper training and experience." Participant 6 concluded, "But so many teachers are doing it naturally and succeeding. So, I think probably just communicating the training, reviewing the data, and making adjustments where we look at our disparities."

### **School Leader's Perspective on the Impact of Restorative Practices on Students**

The implementation of restorative practices is grounded in changing outcomes for students. Depending on the outcome, this may mean different behavioral consequences, developing a relationship to support the student, or providing social and emotional assistance to the student as required. All participants agreed that restorative practices were beneficial to students. Participant 2 felt an explicit connection between using practices and fostering student trust.

This the first time they are seeing it as a safe place, rather than just being told, and the fact that it is, they are seeing that for the first time where they can let their guard down a little bit. They do not have to be tough and put on a show for anybody because they know

I will see right through that because I have gotten to know them for real.

Participant 3 shared that modeling behaviors from adults in the restorative practice translated to changes in student behaviors.

It shows kids that they can come to you when they have messed up, and like we have kids who we have been working with all yours who will come and say, I am sorry I did that. I think modeling is perfect not only for social-emotional learning but just for the confidence of students.

Participant 4 alluded that restorative practices helped build trust with students, school personnel, and leadership.

When they (the students) come in, which is important to me, I do not want a kid to be scared to come into the office. We love them. We want to take care of them. I guess that is our number one guiding principle.

Students were also affected by a strong sense of trust. All participants mentioned trust being an underlying hallmark of effective relationships due to the implementation of restorative practices. Participant 4 shared, "I saw my restorative interventionist stop a girl who had come in late. The two of them did a special handshake. That happens because they have built that level of trust." The utilization of restorative practices enabled Participant 6 to integrate their relationship with the school climate,

When they come in, and they feel it is a safe and supportive environment, then it can turn into something where again, we are giving that student that control, that power that, you know, they are listening to me. They want to know.

Restorative Practices help students to understand how their actions affect others and how they can change their behavior in the future. It also helps to set conditions for students to make mistakes and learn from them. The community and culture built from those practices are what Participant 6 attributes as the hallmark of student impact. "It creates a great community and a culture within a classroom or a school building."

## Summary

Chapter 4 contained information pertaining to research findings, the essential research question and sub-questions, the participants, five themes, and overall conclusions. Results from the study included:

- Restorative practices implementation and utility do not lend themselves to formal systems of practice but informal systems influenced by the school leaders' commitment to their implementation.
- Restorative practices utilize a variety of other staff members for effective implementation and support. Other staff includes dedicated restorative practitioners in addition to the support of school counselors.
- Other social-emotional supports, including trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, and positive behavior interventions support restorative practices.
- Relationships between staff and students are at the core of restorative practices within schools.
- School leaders' perception is that the implementation and utility of restorative practices positively influence students and the overall school climate.

The outcomes of the study will be further discussed in Chapter 5 including discussions, summaries, recommendations, and conclusions.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders (school administrators, principals, assistant principals, deans, and administrative assistants) who have utilized restorative practices rather than punitive discipline. Leaders' perceptions of restorative practices correlated with their experiences and not how they appeared to the researcher. Research from this study indicates that restorative practices are adapted to support specific schools and their goals. Restorative practices are not practiced in isolation, as school leaders often couple RJ with social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and other social-emotional supports. Chapter 5 discusses the connections made to CASEL's social-emotional framework, a summary of the research findings, a listing of the research questions and themes, recommendations for future practice and future research, and overall conclusions.

### **Connections to Restorative Practice and Social-Emotional Learning Theory**

Based on the interviews with Participants, all interviews included some reference to CASEL's social-emotional learning (SEL) framework (2020). Participants referenced coupling restorative practices with SEL that apply a systematic approach emphasizing the importance of an equitable learning environment. Participant 2 connected RJ to trauma-informed practices as well as emotional intelligence, and Participant 3 explicitly connected RJ to SEL. Participant 2 connected practice with the SEL framework by modeling social-emotional support while utilizing RJ. The coordination of SEL and RJ practices enhances the student's learning experience. All participants agreed that restorative practices were beneficial to students.

CASEL's SEL approach (2020) promotes coordinated efforts between the school, the home, and the community. These coordinated efforts help to support restorative justice practices

in schools. In addition, this coordination fosters youth voice, agency, and engagement (CASEL, 2020). Several participants felt that with the utilization of RJ, they elevated student voices. The elevated student voice also enhances school and student relationships. All participants identified that fostering relationships with students and staff was crucial for effective Restorative practices and program implementation. Relationships included creating safe spaces where students could admit wrongdoing without fear of admonishment. For example, participant 8 stated,

I feel the students feel like they have a place. I mean, they can come and say that I heard this, and they know I am not going to blame them, and they know I will listen. They know that we are just trying to keep everybody safe.

The CASEL SEL framework (2020) also promotes supportive school culture approaches to discipline and family and community partnerships. School leaders' perceptions were that the implementation and utility of restorative practices positively influence students and the overall school climate. Participants 4 and 8 stated that the impact of restorative programs was the most beneficial to the students—especially students who often struggle with behavior-related conduct incidents. Based on the responses provided by participants, there are two definitions for levels of support. First, there was the support of teacher practices within the classroom and support of the student utilizing restorative practices. Participant 6 talked a lot about the support in the classroom.

People want to improve. They need different levels of support. When done that way, I think everybody can understand that because we all have things that we need help with, or we mess up in a relationship or unintentionally cause harm to other people and need to work back through that. To restore that relationship.

In the case of student support, support was referenced as a follow-up to restorative practice. Follow-up actions are the "repair of harm" portion of restorative practices. Participant 11 shared,

We must remember as educators that they are kids, will make mistakes, and need support. Sometimes that support does not come from home. Sometimes it takes more at the school level to support those kids and help them out, to go back to those social skills and conflict resolution, those soft skills that kids will need for life.

Finally, the CASEL SEL framework helps frame the school leaders' perspectives on restorative practices in their schools and their perspective on using those practices rather than punitive discipline measures. This framework was selected because understanding the SEL framework helps frame the need for restorative practices within a school to support students' emotional needs and acknowledge any trauma they may have experienced. Relationships were not exclusionary to the student and school relationship. Relationships encompassed the student's families and the community as a whole. While there were varying degrees of community involvement, Participant 12 had experience with community meetings that built relationships with the community. It helped foster restorative practices there and in the school buildings in their district. Across all interviews, there were efforts to foster relationships amongst the parents of students utilizing restorative practices. The relationships garnered support for the methods in place as parents could see how this was trying to benefit their student. According to Participants 12, the perception was that parents agreed that the school was trying to keep their students engaged in their learning on campus.

### **Summary of Findings**

The most powerful theme to emerge was that relationships were vital to effectively utilizing and implementing restorative practices. Darling- Hammond and Cook Harvey (2018)

research states that supportive responsive relationships with caring adults in the foundation for learning. The relationships between students and staff helped foster trust and an overall supportive school climate. Darling- Hammond and Cook Harvey (2018) posits that supportive school climates respond to the needs of their students and propel continued positive growth. This connection helped leaders to call upon expectations when behavior incidents arose, and students would feel supported rather than judged. The school leaders agreed that they were able to utilize punitive discipline less. When they did need to implement a consequence, the student understood because of the established relationship and trust. While school leaders agreed upon the effectiveness of the relationship component, there needed to be more continuity of specific practices from school to school. Most of the practices in place link to social-emotional training, trauma-informed support, or positive behavior initiatives. Research (Darling- Hammond & Cook Harvey 2018; CASEL 2020) support that a whole child approach in education considers not only the academic needs of the students but also the social emotional development. The other united theme was an overall positive benefit to the students. While one school leader referenced a specific connection to a decrease in disparities in the discipline data, others noted phenomenological conclusions like increased student awareness, proactive student responses, and increased student ownership of their actions. Research from Lodi et al (2021) suggests that with the implementation of restorative practices there were positive impacts to the school climate and safety.

### **Research Question 1**

What was the process used to implement restorative practices? Most of the processes described by the Participants included informal systems adopted from supporting practices like trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, or positive behavior interventions and

supports. Additional personnel often supported these informal systems that helped facilitate specific practices like restorative conferences. The Participants also mentioned that school counselors greatly supported the overall implementation of the restorative practices program.

### **Research Question 2**

What are school leader's perceptions of effective restorative practices? School leaders all suggested that the relationship-building practice within restorative practices was the most beneficial. The leaders also noted that the restorative conference was the most common practice among school leaders. The restorative conference was a responsive practice. The conference occurred after there had been an action that had caused harm and needed repairing. As opposed to being restricted to students, the restorative conferences are open to both students and adults, as well as staff with staff. In most cases, all Participants referred to school personnel like restorative liaisons or interventionists to be the ones who carried out the actual conference practice. Several school leaders also stated that they would hold restorative conferences to help repair a relationship with a student when there was a punitive consequence.

### **Research Question 3**

What are school leader perceptions of the effects of restorative practices with disparity subgroups? Overall, Participants concluded that there was an overall positive impact on students and the school climate due to the utilization of restorative practices. Participant 7 specifically referenced their disparity data. "If I look at, you know, our data this year and knowing that our numbers are decreasing across the board with suspensions, our inequities and suspensions have gone down. Our total discipline incidents have gone down." The Participants felt a connection between the decline of the disparities in their discipline data and the implementation of restorative practices. Participants 2,6, and 11 mentioned an overall decrease in discipline

incidents attributed to using restorative practices. All participants referenced an impact on their school climate. There was a positive correlation between implementing restorative practices and the school climate. While Participant 2 referenced less buy-in with some teachers, they also referenced that when they were a part of the process, staff became more supportive of the general practice's effectiveness. Participant 8 referenced an event that helped a teacher understand a student's backstory, which fostered a relationship rather than the teacher's continued use of punitive discipline.

When I brought the teacher and the student together, and the student started saying all the things that were going on and why he did this and why they did that, I think the teacher found a better understanding of why the student responded the way they did it. I know it changed the way she interacted with that student.

Participant 3 summarized this as a top-down process in that adults are the models for the students. Adults being an active part of the practice fosters a culture that Participant 3 summarized as "I think restorative practices make kids a part of the culture, not just a student in a school with culture."

### **Recommendations for Future Practice**

Based on the summary of the findings, the following are recommendations for implementation for future practice:

- Develop an implementation guide that outlines specific practices and implementation goals.
- Develop professional development activities that help to support the implementation and utilization of restorative practices in school programs with an emphasis on specific practices.

- Develop specific job descriptions for other school personnel that helps with the implementation and utilization of restorative practices.
- Develop a crosswalk of practices and other supporting frameworks to include social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and positive behavior interventions and supports.
- Develop a crosswalk for practices and program goals for school leaders and school counselors.
- Develop a progressive discipline program that utilizes restorative practices before punitive measures.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the summary findings, the following are recommendations for future research:

- Restorative practice should be studied from the perspective of the student in order to determine the impact it has on overall school culture. To date, all research conducted was through the lens of adults within school systems.
- Research should focus on restorative practice training's impact on new professional teachers' classroom management skills.
- Conduct a study that utilizes this research with school leaders who no longer utilize or implement practices to understand why they were less effective.
- Conduct a study that utilizes this research with teachers perspectives about the effectiveness and overall impact of restorative practices.
- Replication of this study to include Elementary School Leaders.
- Replication of the study to include School Leaders from various schools across the United States.

## **Conclusion**

Over the past decade, there has been growth in the knowledge of alternative strategies that hold more potential for reducing school disruption and ensuring the safety of all students. Skiba (2014) suggests that preventive behavior and discipline support help to address safety, disruption, and discipline. Restorative practices, understanding the impact of adverse childhood experiences, and trauma-informed practices are just a few of the initiatives that schools utilize to help create a more culturally responsive approach to understanding the whole student. In addition, culturally responsive comprehensive programs also utilize school-wide planning and improved class management that help build consistency and communication, which is critical when handling misbehaviors and teaching appropriate behaviors. Social-emotional learning or trauma-informed practices help foster a positive school climate by teaching students' alternative ways of expressing and resolving interpersonal problems. Skiba (2014) concludes that parental and community involvement as active parts of the community rather than excluding them from the behavioral process. Self-reflection of practitioners is also a key hallmark of changing disparity outcomes (Henry et al., 2021). Professionals who want to reduce disparities must engage in self-reflective practice and open discourse around racism in education (Henry et al., 2021). Improving equity gaps will require school teams to communicate, plan, and take action together.

Data analysis revealed, there was a consistent sentiment that a school leader's job was to support students and their needs. School leaders can choose how to handle discipline within their schools. They can challenge themselves to be better, do better, and foster an environment that sees students and supports them the way they come to the schoolhouse rather than punishing them for who they want them to be.

## References

- Acosta, Joie, Matthew Chinman, Patricia Ebener, Patrick S. Malone, Andrea Phillips, and Asa Wilks. "Evaluation of a whole-school change intervention: Findings from a two-year cluster-randomized trial of the restorative practices intervention." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 48, no. 5 (2019): 876-890.
- Act, G. F. S. (1994). Public Law 103-382, 108 Statute 3907.
- Allman, K. L., & Slate, J. R. (2011). School discipline in public education: A brief review of current practices. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 6(2), n2.
- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *The American Psychologist*, 63(9), 852-862.
- Arum, R., & Velez, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Improving learning environments: School discipline and student achievement in comparative perspective*. Stanford University Press
- Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V., & Fox, J.H. (2015). *Sent home and put off track: The antecedents, disproportionalities, and consequences of being suspended in 9th grade*. In D. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion* (pp. 17-30). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Bazemore, G., & Shiff, M. (2005). *Juvenile justice and reform & restorative justice: Building theory and policy from practice*. Devon, United Kingdom, and Portland, OR: Willan Publishing.
- Breakwell, G. M. (1997). *Coping with aggressive behavior*. Leicester, UK: BPS Blackwell.
- Brown, M. A. (2017). Being heard: How a listening culture supports the implementation of schoolwide restorative practices. *Restorative Justice*, 5(1), 53-69.

- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2016). Trauma-informed positive education: Using positive psychology to strengthen vulnerable students. *Contemporary School Psychology, 20*(1), 63-83.
- Bottiani, J. H., McDaniel, H. L., Henderson, L., Castillo, J. E., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2020). Buffering effects of racial discrimination on school engagement: The role of culturally responsive teachers and Caring School Police. *Journal of School Health, 90*(12), 1019–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12967>
- Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and practice, 2*(1), 1-10.
- Carr, S. (2012, May 22). Do "zero-tolerance" school discipline policies go too far? *Time*.
- Casel Framework*. CASEL. (2022, August 3). Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (2014). Trauma-informed care in behavioral health services.
- Chafouleas, S. M., Johnson, A. H., Overstreet, S., & Santos, N. M. (2016). Toward a blueprint for trauma-informed service delivery in schools. *School Mental Health, 8*(1), 144-162.
- Children's Defense Fund. 1975. "School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?" Cambridge, MA: Children's Defense Fund.
- Cookson Jr, P. W. (2017). Exploring Equity Issues: Building Relationships for Student Success. *Center for Education Equity, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium*.
- Cornell, D. G., & Mayer, M. J. (2010). Why do school order and safety matter?. *Educational researcher, 39*(1), 7-15.

- Craig, J. M., Piquero, A. R., Farrington, D. P., & Ttofi, M. M. (2017). A little early risk goes a long bad way: Adverse childhood experiences and life-course offending in the Cambridge study. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 53, 34-45.
- Crawley, K., & Hirschfield, P. (2018). Examining the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.346>
- Crenshaw, K., Ocen, P., Nanda, J. & Carranza, T. (2015). Black girls matter: Pushed Out, overpoliced, and underprotected. Columbia Law School, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, African American Policy Forum.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success. *Learning Policy Institute*.
- Darling-Hammond, S., Trout, L., Fronius, T., & Cerna, R. (2021). Can restorative practices bridge the racial disparities in schools? . *West Ed* .
- Darling-Hammond, S., Fronius, T. A., Sutherland, H., Guckenburg, S., Petrosino, A., & Hurley, N. (2020). *Effectiveness of Restorative Justice in US K-12 Schools: a Review of Quantitative Research*. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 24(3), 295–308.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00290-0>
- Davidson, J. R. T. (2000). Trauma: the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 14(2\_suppl1), S5-S12.
- De Jong, T., & Griffiths, C. (2006). The role of alternative education programs in meeting the needs of adolescent students with challenging behavior: Characteristics of best practice. *Journal of Psychologists and Counselors in Schools*, 16(1), 29-40.

- Dhaliwal, T. K., Daramola, E. J., Alonso, J. D., & Marsh, J. A. (2023). Educators' beliefs and perceptions of implementing restorative practices. *Education and Urban Society*, 55(1), 88-118.
- Dierkhising, C. B., Ko, S. J., Woods-Jaeger, B., Briggs, E. C., Lee, R., & Pynoos, R. S. (2013). Trauma histories among justice-involved youth: Findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *European journal of psychotraumatology*, 4(1), 20274
- Dinehart, L. H., Katz, L. F., Manfra, L., & Ullery, M. A. (2013). Providing quality early care and education to young children who experience maltreatment: A review of the literature. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41(4), 283-290.
- Fabelo, T., Thompson, M.D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M.P., III, & Booth, E.A. (2011). *Breaking school rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement*. New York, NY: Council of State Governments.
- Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 14(4), 245-258
- Fisher, P. W., Shaffer, D., Piacentini, J. C., Lapkin, J., Kafantaris, V., Leonard, H., & Herzog, D. B. (1993). Sensitivity of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children, (DISC-2.1) for specific diagnoses of children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 32(3), 666-673.

- Fronius, T., Darling-Hammond, S., Persson, H., Guckenberger, S., Hurley, N., & Petrosino, A. (2019). Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools An Updated Research Review. *West Ed Justice and Prevention Research Center*.
- Gerlinger, J., Viano, S., Gardella, J. H., Fisher, B. W., Chris Curran, F., & Higgins, E. M. (2021). Exclusionary school discipline and delinquent outcomes: a meta-analysis. *Journal of youth and adolescence, 50*(8), 1493-1509
- González, T. (2015). Socializing schools: Addressing racial disparities in discipline through restorative justice. *Thalia González, Socializing Schools: Addressing Racial Disparities in Discipline Through Restorative Justice, in Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion (Daniel J. Losen ed., 2014)*.
- Gregory, A., Allen, J. P., Mikami, A. Y., Hafen, C. A., & Pianta, R. C. (2014). Effects of a professional development program on behavioral engagement of students in middle and high school. *Psychology in the Schools, 51*(2), 143-163.
- Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *The future of children, 117-136*.
- Hantzopoulos, M. (2013). The fairness committee: *Restorative justice in small urban public high school*. *Prevention Researcher, 20*(1), 7-10.
- Hayden, E. P., Mash, E. J., & Barkley, R. A. (2014). Child psychopathology. *Child Psychopathology, 1*.
- Hemphill, S. A., Herrenkohl, T. I., Plenty, S. M., Toumbourou, J. W., Catalano, R. F., & McMorris, B. J. (2012). Pathways from school suspension to adolescent nonviolent antisocial behavior in students in Victoria, Australia and Washington State, United States. *Journal of community psychology, 40*(3), 301-318.

- Herrenkohl, T. I., Maguin, E., Hill, K. G., Hawkins, J. D., Abbott, R. D., & Catalano, R. F. (2000). Developmental risk factors for youth violence. *Journal of adolescent health, 26*(3), 176-186.
- Herrenkohl, T. I., Hong, S., & Verbrugge, B. (2019). Trauma informed programs based in schools: Linking concepts to practices and assessing the evidence. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 64*(3-4), 373-388.
- Heaviside, S. (1998). *Violence and discipline problems in US public schools: 1996-97* (Vol. 5). US Government Printing Office
- Himmelstein, K. E., & Brückner, H. (2011). Criminal-justice and school sanctions against nonheterosexual youth: A national longitudinal study. *Pediatrics, 127*(1), 49-57.
- Hobbs, C., Paulsen, D., & Thomas, J. (2019). Trauma-informed practice for pre-service teachers. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*
- Howard, T. C. (2013). How does it feel to be a problem? Black male students, schools, and learning in enhancing the knowledge base to disrupt deficit frameworks. *Review of Research in Education, 37*(1), 54-86.
- Hwang, N., Penner, E. K., Davison, M., Sanabria, T., Hanselman, P., Domina, T., & Penner, A. M. (2022). Reining in Punitive Discipline: Recent Trends in Exclusionary School Discipline Disparities. *Socius, 8*, 23780231221103044.
- I. I. R. P. (n.d.). *Restorative practices: Explained: Restorative practices*. IIRP. Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://www.iirp.edu/restorativepractices/explained>
- Ispa-Landa, S. (2017). Racial and gender inequality and school discipline: Toward a more comprehensive view of school policy. *Social Currents, 4*(6), 511-517.

- Klevan, S. (2021). Building a positive school climate through restorative practices.  
<https://doi.org/10.54300/178.861>
- Lhamon, C. E., & Samuels, J. (2014). Dear Colleague letter from the US Department of Justice and the US Department of Education.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New directions for program evaluation*, 1986(30), 73-84.
- Lodi, E., Perrella, L., Lepri, G. L., Scarpa, M. L., & Patrizi, P. (2022). Use of restorative justice and restorative practices at school: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(1), 96.
- Losen, D. J. (2011). Discipline policies, successful schools, and racial justice.
- Losen, D. (Ed.). (2014) *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Losen, D. J., & Skiba, R. J. (2010). Suspended education. *Policy report for the Southern Poverty Law Center*.
- Lustick, H. (2020). Going restorative, staying tough: Urban principals' perceptions of restorative practices in collocated small schools. *Education and Urban Society*, 53(7), 739–760.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124520974335>
- Margolin, G., & Gordis, E. B. (2003). Co-occurrence between marital aggression and parents' child abuse potential: The impact of cumulative stress. *Violence and victims*, 18(3), 243-258.
- McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Riddell, S., Stead, J., & Weedon, E. (2008). Can restorative practices in schools make a difference? *Educational Review*, 60(4), 405–417.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910802393456>

- Mirsky, J., Kohn, R., Dolberg, P., & Levav, I. (2011). Suicidal behavior among immigrants. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 46(11), 1133-1141.
- Mongan, P., & Walker, R. (2012). "The road to hell is paved with good intentions": A historical, theoretical, and legal analysis of zero-tolerance weapons policies in American schools. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 56(4), 232-240
- Morrison, B. E., & Vaandering, D. (2012). Restorative justice: Pedagogy, praxis, and discipline. *Journal of school violence*, 11(2), 138-155
- Muniz, C. N., Fox, B., Miley, L. N., Delisi, M., Cigarran, G. P., & Birnbaum, A. (2019). The effects of adverse childhood experiences on internalizing versus externalizing outcomes. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 46(4), 568-589
- National School Climate Council. (n.d.). What is school climate and why is it important? <https://www.schoolclimate.org/school-climate>.
- Nagin, D. S. (1998). Criminal deterrence research at the outset of the twenty-first century. *Crime and justice*, 23, 1-42
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on medical education*, 8(2), 90-97.
- Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational researcher*, 39(1), 48-58.
- Pavelka, S. (2013). Practices and policies for implementing restorative justice within schools. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e534982013-005>
- Payne, A., & Welch, K. (2010). *Modeling the effects of racial threat on punitive and restorative school discipline practices*. *Criminology*, 48(4), 1019-1062.

- Perry, B. D. (2009). Examining child maltreatment through a neurodevelopmental lens: Clinical applications of the neurosequential model of therapeutics. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 14*(4), 240-255.
- Perry, D. L., & Daniels, M. L. (2016). Implementing trauma—informed practices in the school setting: A pilot study. *School Mental Health, 8*(1), 177-188.
- Petras, H., Masyn, K. E., Buckley, J. A., Ialongo, N. S., & Kellam, S. (2011). Who is most at risk for school removal? A multilevel discrete-time survival analysis of individual-and context-level influences. *Journal of educational psychology, 103*(1), 223.
- Phifer, L. W., & Hull, R. (2016). Helping students heal: Observations of trauma-informed practices in the schools. *School Mental Health, 8*(1), 201-205.
- Pynoos, R. S., Fairbank, J. A., Steinberg, A. M., Amaya-Jackson, L., Gerrity, E., Mount, M. L., & Maze, J. (2008). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: collaborating to improve the standard of care. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 39*(4), 389.
- Record-Lemon, R. M., & Buchanan, M. J. (2017). Trauma-informed practices in schools: A narrative literature review. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 51*(4).
- Ryan, J. P., Jacob, B. A., Gross, M., Perron, B. E., Moore, A., & Ferguson, S. (2018). Early exposure to child maltreatment and academic outcomes. *Child maltreatment, 23*(4), 365-375.
- Sandwick, T., Hahn, J. W., & Hassoun Ayoub, L. (2019). Fostering community, sharing power: Lessons for building restorative justice school cultures. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27*, 145. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4296>

- Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, and Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Siegel, B. S., Dobbins, M. I., Earls, M. F., ... & Wood, D. L. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, *129*(1), e232-e246.
- Sergiovanni, T.J. (2000). *The lifeworld of leadership. Creating community, culture, and personal meaning in our schools.* John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Schiff, M. (2018). Can restorative justice disrupt the ‘school-to-prison pipeline?’ *Contemporary Justice Review*, *21*(2), 121–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2018.1455509>
- Schulman, M., & Maul, A. (2019). Screening for adverse childhood experiences and trauma. *Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center. Retrieved December, 1, 2020.*
- Shonk, S. M., & Cicchetti, D. (2001). Maltreatment, competency deficits, and risk for academic and behavioral maladjustment. *Developmental psychology*, *37*(1), 3
- Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, and Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Siegel, B. S., Dobbins, M. I., Earls, M. F., ... & Wood, D. L. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, *129*(1), e232-e246.
- Skiba, R. J. (2014). The failure of zero tolerance. *Reclaiming children and youth*, *22*(4), 27
- Skiba, R. J., & Peterson, R. L. (2000). School discipline at a crossroads: From zero tolerance to early response. *Exceptional children*, *66*(3), 335-346
- Skiba, R., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). *School Disciplinary Systems: Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion*

- Skiba, R. J., Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E. B., Losen, D. J., & Harry, E. G. (2016). Risks and consequences of oversimplifying educational inequities: A response to Morgan et al. (2015). *Educational Researcher*, 45(3), 221-225.
- Smyth, J., Robinson, J., & McInerney, P. (2014). It's our turn—young people 'tilting the neoliberal turn. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(4), 492-509.
- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44(1), 26-28
- Steinberg, M. P., & Lacoë, J. (2017). What do we know about school discipline reform? Assessing the alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. *Education next*, 17(1), 44-53.
- Taylor, M. C., & Foster, G. A. (1986). Bad boys and school suspensions: Public policy implications for black males. *Sociological Inquiry*, 56(4), 498-506.
- Taylor, L. K., & Weems, C. F. (2009). What do youth report as a traumatic event? Toward a developmentally informed classification of traumatic stressors. *Psychological trauma: Theory, research, practice, and policy*, 1(2), 91.
- Tennessee leaders for Equity Playbook - TN.gov*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/reports/Tennessee-Leaders-for-Equity-Playbook.pdf>
- TN State Report Card*. TN. (n.d.). Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://www.tn.gov/education/families/report-card.html>
- Terrasi, S., & De Galarce, P. C. (2017). Trauma and learning in America's classrooms. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(6), 35-41.
- Te Riele, K. (2014). Putting the jigsaw together: Flexible learning programs in Australia final report.

- Troyan, B. E. (2003). The silent treatment: Perpetual in-school suspension and the educational rights of students. *Texas Law Review*, 81, 1637-1670.
- US Department of Education (ED). (2021, August 3). *Joint - Dear Colleague letter*. Home. Retrieved December 7, 2023, from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html>
- Velez, G., Hahn, M., Recchia, H., & Wainryb, C. (2020). Rethinking responses to youth black rebellion: Recent growth and development of restorative practices in schools. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 35, 36–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.02.011>
- Wall, L., Higgins, D., & Hunter, C. (2016). *Trauma-informed care in child/family welfare services*. Australian Institute of Family Studies, Child Family Community Australia.
- Wearmouth, J., Mckinney, R., & Glynn, T. (2007). Restorative justice in schools: A New Zealand example. *Educational Research*, 49(1), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880701200740>
- Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial threat and punitive school discipline. *Social Problems*, 57(1), 25-48.
- Welsh, R. O., & Little, S. (2018). The school discipline dilemma: A comprehensive review of disparities and alternative approaches. *Review of educational research*, 88(5), 752-794.
- West, S. D., Day, A. G., Somers, C. L., & Baroni, B. A. (2014). Student perspectives on how trauma experiences manifest in the classroom: Engaging court-involved youth in the development of a trauma-informed teaching curriculum. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 38, 58-65.
- Widom, C. S. (2000). Childhood Victimization: Early Adversity, Later Psychopathology. National Institute of Justice Journal, 2000. *National institute of justice journal*, 242, 3-9.

Winn, M. T. (2018). Building a “lifetime circle”: English education in the age of#  
BlackLivesMatter. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 248-264.

Wu, S. C., Pink, W. T., Crain, R. L., and Moles, O. (1982). Student suspension: A critical  
reappraisal. *The Urban Review* 14: 245–303.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hello,

I am a Doctoral Student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), and I am conducting a research study that involves Restorative Practices in schools. I am looking for people who have been Administrators and have utilized these practices in their schools. A summary of the research project is included below. Please think about participating. Participation is voluntary. If you know of others who would fit this criterion and would be willing to participate, please feel free to forward this email on my behalf. If you have any questions, please contact me at [rutigd@etsu.edu](mailto:rutigd@etsu.edu) or 865-454-6436.

Sincerely,

Danielle Rutig

Doctoral Student

East Tennessee State University

[rutigd@etsu.edu](mailto:rutigd@etsu.edu)

865-454-6436

**Title of Research Study:** School Leader Perceptions about the Use of Restorative Practices

**Principal Investigator:** Danielle Rutig: Assistant Principal Knox County Schools

**Organization of Principal Investigator:** East Tennessee State University

## SUMMARY:

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders (principals, assistant principals, and administrative assistants) who have utilized restorative justice practices rather than punitive discipline. At this stage, *restorative justice practices are* processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrong doing (International Institute for Restorative Practices ,2012). Methods of inquiry will include phenomenological reflection of discipline practices. The study may be limited to only practices used within the school systems in the East Tennessee region.

Data collection strategies will include semi-structured, one-on-one interviews conducted via a virtual platform with transcription. The researcher will code the interviews, transcribe and identify emergent themes, and have persons interviewed members check the transcripts for accuracy.

## **Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Research Questions**

The essential question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of East Tennessee school leaders related to the implementation and utility of Restorative Practices in their schools'?

The supporting sub questions for the study included:

RQ1: What was the process used to implement restorative practices rather than punitive discipline?

- Will you describe the systems you have in place for utilizing restorative practices?
- Will you describe the requirements for your staff when utilizing restorative practices?
- Will you give an example of when you utilized a restorative practice rather than punitive discipline?

RQ2: What are the school leader's perceptions of the most effective restorative practices utilized?

- Will you please describe the restorative practices utilized within your school?
- Based on your perception, what is the most effective restorative practice utilized within your school?
- Will you please provide an example of how you utilized the most effective restorative practice within your school?

RQ3: What are school leaders' perceptions of the effects of restorative justice practices with disparity subgroups?

- Describe your background/ context of utilizing restorative practices.
- What effect did you think restorative practices had on your students?

- What effect did you think restorative practices had on your school climate?

VITA

DANIELLE RUTIG

Education: Ed.D. Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, East Tennessee  
State University Johnson City, Tennessee 2023  
Ed.S. Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of  
Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2017  
M.S. Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of  
Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2015  
B.S. Elementary Education, Florida State University, Tallahassee,  
Florida, 2004  
Broward County Schools, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

Professional Experience: Assistant Principal, Central High School; Knoxville, Tennessee,  
2019-2022  
Assistant Principal, Clinton Middle School, Clinton, TN, 2016 -  
2019  
Assistant Principal, Norwood Middle School, Clinton, TN, 2015-  
2016  
Elementary Teacher, Anderson County Schools, Clinton, TN,  
2007-2015  
Elementary Teacher, Broward County Schools, Ft. Lauderdale,  
2005-2007