

Implementing Restorative Principles and Practices in Vermont Schools

REPORT

October 13,
2016

A meeting Report on the Future Visions, Current Initiatives and Strategic Recommendations of Restorative Practice Trainers and Vested Stakeholders

Submitted by Marc Wennberg, Consultant

The meeting and report was sponsored by the Vermont Agency of Education (Grant #32374, Amendment #000). The report was authored by Marc Wennberg. The October 13th meeting was facilitated by Nicole Brownstein, Nellie Haddad and Marc Wennberg.



Executive Summary

On October 13, 2016, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) sponsored a facilitated dialogue on the training and implementation of educationally-based restorative practices (RP). A total of 20 RP trainers and vested stakeholders¹ participated in the meeting, exploring three core questions:

1. What practices, trainings, policies and outcomes would be present in a school that fully embraces RP?
2. What is the current context, including strengths and challenges, of RP training and implementation in Vermont's schools?
3. What concrete steps should be taken to strengthen and expand the training and implementation of RP in Vermont's schools?

The meeting² began with a Circle Process to both develop meeting guidelines and share perspectives on: "**Why Restorative Principles and Practices in schools**". Following the Circle, Jon Kidde (RP Consultant and Trainer) and Sherry Schoenberg (Coordinator of BEST) offered brief presentations on the potential alignment of RP and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).³ Their presentations provided the framework for a 'tiered RP approach,' which informed the subsequent small and large-group discussions.

The first break-out session was dedicated to identifying the qualities, practices and outcomes of a fully restorative school. The purpose of these discussions, which took place in three small groups, was to establish an **Aspirational Vision** of a restorative school in order to inform and shape the meeting participants' eventual recommendations.

In the second break-out session, participants discussed the **Current Context** of RP in Vermont schools, including: initiatives (from pre-implementation through tier three), training, successes, challenges and resources. These discussions, which took place in two small groups, clarified the current state of school-based restorative training and implementation (for those present in the room).

The final session of the day was dedicated to facilitating and capturing participants' **Recommendations**. Prior to offering their recommendations, participants reviewed the bulleted notes from the **Aspirational Visions** and **Current Context** small groups. The purpose of the review was to develop recommendations that would strengthen and expand current RP training and implementation in Vermont.

Following the notes review, participants gathered as a large group and offered recommendations in a modified Circle Process. By the end of several 'rounds,' participants had offered a total of forty-eight recommendations. The following is a broad summary of the thematic content of these **Recommendations**:

¹ See Attendance List in the Appendix

² The Meeting Agenda can be found in the Appendix

³ Jon Kidde and Sherry Schoenberg's hand-outs are included as additional documents to this report.

1. **Advocacy:** In order to establish a more supportive environment for the training and implementation of RP in schools, there should be a coordinated advocacy campaign that involves local, regional and statewide stakeholders and officials.
2. **Resources:** In order to strengthen the training and implementation of RP in schools, local and statewide educational institutions should increase and equitably allocate financial, technical and administrative resources to the effort.
3. **Training:** In order to expand the reach of RP and improve the climate and culture of VT schools, there should be local, regional and statewide efforts to develop more consistent, high-quality RP training standards and practices.
4. **Policy:** In order to establish a more conducive environment for the implementation of RP in schools, local, regional and statewide stakeholders should review and revise existing policies to reflect restorative principles and values.
5. **Data Analysis:** In order to document both the purpose and impact of RP in schools, the AOE should establish current baseline data and expected outcomes from RP interventions.
6. **Networking:** In order to strengthen connections and shared-learning between school-based RP trainers, implementers and stakeholders, there should be concerted local, regional and statewide efforts to establish (or broaden) networking opportunities.

In addition to the facilitated conversations, meeting organizers distributed and collected a simple form⁴ that catalogued the participants' RP initiatives (and knowledge of other initiatives). Although this exercise offered only limited data, participants expressed interest in the statewide distribution of a similar survey. Such a survey would help to establish more complete data on Vermont's scope of school-based RP initiatives; and support the implementation of the above recommendations.

A few final notes about methodology:

1. In preparing this report, Marc Wennberg has aggregated participants' insights, reflections and recommendations with limited analysis and/or synthesis.
2. The Report presents the contributions of participants who were present for the meeting and as such, does not intend to reflect the full spectrum of perspectives of Vermont's RP trainers and vested stakeholders.
3. This Report's recommendations are organized according to themes. Going forward, the AOE may want to reorganize and prioritize the recommendations into a strategic plan that reflects available resources; implementation analysis; and realistic timelines.

A full summary of the **"Why Restorative Principles and Practices", Aspirational Visions, Current Context and Recommendations** can be found below.

"Why Restorative Principles and Practices in Schools?"

The following is a summary of the participants' responses:

- "Students and communities are struggling with a number of social, academic and health challenges. RP allow children to be heard."

⁴ The sample form can be found in the Appendix

- “RP offer students essential skills in communication and provide a framework for them to solve their own conflicts.”
- “RP promote health, wellness and peace both as a response and as prevention. People who are excluded tend to engage in bad behaviors. RP are inclusive.”
- “School is the place where the majority of young people gather and offers an opportunity to shape what is not taking place in communities or families.”
- “Youth are coming up short and are lacking in basic skills. RP offers a framework to develop their skills.”
- “Middle Schools have lost their way. Soft skills are not being provided. RP provides practice in dealing with conflict and helps move away from just reacting.”
- “Current educational system leads to exclusion and prison, particularly for minorities. RP offers an opportunity to look at ourselves and engage and listen to youth.”
- “It’s important to ask what’s going right. RP is an alternative to the current exclusionary regulations and policies.”
- “RP focuses on relationships and creates a sense of safety and belonging for school communities: positive school environments impact families and communities.”
- “RP provides a path for teachers to engage their hearts and souls in the school and a structure and process to ‘show up’. Students feel heard with RP.”
- “Schools have become sterile. RP offers a way to listen and honor the voices of adolescents. RP has changed my life as a teacher and professional.”
- “RP offers a way for children and youth to learn from their mistakes. Families and students have expressed gratitude for having a chance to be heard.”
- “RP pulls kids in rather than kicks them out. The practices offer an ‘emotionally-based’ education in addition to the ‘proficiency-based’ education.”
- “RP provides an opportunity to create a truly emotionally-safe and inclusive school for both students and adults.”
- “RP counters the negative feedback that many youth receive from society. RP allows us to hear our students in an individualized way.”
- “RP provides an opportunity for schools to focus on relational aspects of education. There also is an opportunity to impact systems.”
- “Health lives in connection. Distress lives in isolation. RP in schools provides an opportunity to engage youth where they are and build connection.”
- “RP in schools is a turning point. It’s about humanity and mental health and it comes from a heart-filled place.”
- “RP helps ensure equity and provides a fair and just way to resolve conflict and wrongdoing with dignity.”

Breakout Session 1: Aspirational Visions of a Restorative School

The following is a combined and thematically organized summary of the small-group discussions on a *Fully Restorative School*:

1. **Preparation:** When aspiring to establish a fully restorative school, participants emphasized the importance of preparation, “buy-in” and strategic implementation.
 - a. It’s important to establish commonly held values and behavioral expectations. These values and expectations would be established and held by all members of

- the school community, including administrators, teachers, students, families, and all of a school's support staff.
- b. Values and expectations need to be revisited and recommitted throughout a school year (and across school years).
 - c. There is a clear and commonly-held sense of a school's restorative mission, vision and principles.
 - d. There needs to be a way to assess actual 'buy-in': identify measurable indicators of understanding and commitment to restorative values and practices.
2. **Qualities:** Participants identified several qualities of a fully restorative school, including:
- a. The school community is permeated with a sense of emotional and physical safety.
 - b. Students are listened to and empowered to both take responsibility for themselves and support others. This includes:
 - i. Clear indicators of student leadership and voice such as the capacity to call for and facilitate circle processes.
 - ii. Students share and use restorative techniques and processes with families and friends.
 - c. Positive student and staff relationships would be valued, encouraged and supported, including:
 - i. Basic needs of students and staff are met.
 - ii. Students and staff know and connect with each other (every student would have at least one caring relationship with a school staff member).
 - iii. Positive feedback to students would far outweigh negative.
 - iv. Relationships would be grounded in equality and include mutual accountability between students and staff.
 - v. Staff would know how to utilize RP as a tool for developing meaningful relationships with students.
 - vi. Non-judgmental language would be the norm for both students and staff.
3. **Training:** In the participants' aspirational visions, training in RP is high-quality, funded and supported for teachers, staff and students. This includes:
- a. Required school-wide training in RP principles and framework;
 - b. Training in Circles and other specific RP;
 - c. Training of RP as a competency in Teacher licensure;
 - d. Consistent and regular training throughout the school year and every year;
 - e. Regional gatherings with other schools implementing RP would be encouraged and supported to share learning and challenges.
4. **Practices:** Participants identified several RP across all three tiers in a fully restorative school. These include:
- a. Restorative Dialogues that include all voices in the establishment of school values, principles and expectations.
 - b. Circles are regularly utilized for a range of purposes and would be 'owned by all.'
 - c. Restorative processes, questions and dialogue would be utilized when 'something goes wrong'. The restorative processes could/should include:
 - i. Consistently employed restorative questions to provide students and staff with a familiar and clear framework.

- ii. Restorative agreements focus on harmed relationships rather than rules broken.
 - iii. Clear plans/agreements (that are verified and followed) that are responsive to the needs of the affected parties.
 - iv. Student could offer mutual support as part of restorative agreements (example: mentorship).
 - d. Student Reintegration (after a suspension) will be intentional and informed by restorative processes and values.
- 5. **Stakeholders:** Participants identified parents and communities as important stakeholders to a Restorative School.
 - a. In a restorative school, parents will:
 - i. Know and support the school's values and behavioral expectations
 - ii. Understand how issues are handled with RP
 - iii. Are presented the above information in a relational way (not just through hand-book)
 - iv. Receive regular updates with positive feedback about their children
 - v. Participate in Reentry Circles if their child is reintegrating into the school community.
 - b. In a restorative school, communities will:
 - i. Understand, support and participate (when appropriate) in RP in schools.
- 6. **Policies:** Participants identified several school policies that would support the implementation and practice of RP. These include:
 - a. Creating time and space within school schedules for RP training, conversations and processes (including between teachers);
 - b. Policies are guided by the school's restorative values and principles and focus on relationships rather than rules;
 - c. Policies would encourage RP in response to wrongdoing without prescribing the outcomes of the process;
 - d. Faculty supervision meetings and performance reviews would be performed within a framework of Restorative Principles;
 - e. RP would be in alignment and integrated with other state-supported frameworks, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).
- 7. **Data Indicators:** Participants offered a number of data indicators that would be developed and tracked to gauge improvement in educational outcomes as a result of RP. These include:
 - a. Culture and climate surveys;
 - b. Student and parent surveys;
 - c. Attendance;
 - d. Academic improvement;
 - e. Achievement gaps;
 - f. Per-class failure rates;
 - g. Negative interactions with School Resource Officers;
 - h. Classroom and school exclusions;
 - i. Drop outs;
 - j. Teacher retention;
 - k. Parent involvement.

Breakout Session 2: Current Context of RP Training and Implementation

The following is a combined and thematically organized summary of the small-group discussions on the *current context* of Vermont's RP Training and Initiatives in schools:

1. **Current Restorative Practice Initiatives:** There is little consensus (although much interest) amongst participants on how best to introduce RP in schools. This is a reflection of the rapid organic spread of RP rather than strategic disagreement: schools are implementing RP with a diversity of needs and approaches. This was amply reflected in the small group conversations. Participants indicated that RP are being employed to:
 - a. Build positive school culture and climates (Tier 1). These initiatives range from pilot projects in single grades to whole school approaches.
 - b. Respond to harm or wrongdoing (Tier 2). These initiatives vary from formal processes to informal conversations. There also is diversity amongst schools in the types of harm addressed through RP, from low-level incidents to more serious wrongdoing.In addition to the above initiatives, a small number of schools are also employing RP to:
 - c. Prepare for implementation by securing buy-in from key stakeholders (administrators, etc.) and building momentum.
 - d. Reintegrate students after time away from the classroom (Tier 3).
2. **Training:** Schools are accessing a variety of RJ training resources (both in-state and out) in their efforts to implement RP. These include:
 - a. Community and Restorative Justice Centers (RJC/CJC): Schools are drawing upon their local RJC/CJC to provide training to administrators, teachers and staff. These Centers do not appear to be accessed uniformly (there a total of 21 Centers across the state) but rather seem concentrated in specific local communities.
 - b. Independent Consultants: There are a select number of Independent Consultants who offer regional and statewide trainings as well as on-site consultation, training and technical assistance.⁵
 - c. School Staff: Some meeting participants are traveling to both in and out-of-state RP trainings and then provide training to their local school communities.
3. **Strengths, Challenges and Concerns:** Meeting participants uniformly expressed passion and commitment to the work of integrating and implementing RP into schools, and identified a number of successes in their efforts. Participants also named several local and systemic challenges to the implementation of RP as well as emerging concerns.
 - a. The small groups identified the following *strengths*:
 - i. Students appear to gravitate towards, understand and embrace RP;
 - ii. Students are learning to self-advocate by requesting RP;
 - iii. Students are gaining leadership skills and voice through RP;
 - iv. Restorative dialogues are being effectively used when 'something goes wrong' (between students or between students and staff);

⁵ Over the course of the past year, Jon Kidde and Lisa Bedinger have trained more than 260 school staff (mostly teachers and administrators) in their day-long Advancing RJ in Schools Training. Over the past three years, Susan Cherry (Director of the St. Johnsbury CJC) has trained 63 school professionals at her 3-day Institute for RP.

- v. Some schools are developing skilled RP teams that can provide classroom and teacher support when ‘something goes wrong’;
 - vi. Parents are expressing gratitude for their children’s opportunity to participate in RP;
 - vii. Teachers are successfully being trained and then utilizing their skills;
 - viii. Skeptical staff are witnessing the benefits of RP through effective implementation;
 - ix. Some schools are finding creative ways to use their schedules in support of RP training and implementation;
 - x. Staff are recognizing potential alignment between PBIS and RP as well as with Personalized Learning Plans, Developmental Design and other frameworks;
 - xi. A few schools reported promising data after the implementation of RP;
 - xii. There are modest but promising efforts to connect educationally-based restorative practitioners with each other through regional groups and online resources.
- b. The small groups identified the following *challenges*:
- i. Establishing a ‘culture of listening’ is difficult;
 - ii. Existing administration/teacher relations can impact buy-in and acceptance of RP, particularly if implemented from the ‘top down’;
 - iii. Knowledge and understanding of Restorative Practices and Principles is not widespread among school staff;
 - iv. There is a lack of resources, coordination and support for the effective training of RP;
 - v. Schools’ limited time coupled with competing curriculum priorities constrain the effectiveness of RP training and implementation;
 - vi. Performance evaluations and union policies do not encourage the use of RP amongst staff/administration;
 - vii. Inflexible and prescriptive school policies limit the scope and effectiveness of restorative interventions;
 - viii. There is a lack of buy-in or knowledge amongst parents and surrounding communities;
 - ix. There currently is limited data collection and analysis connected to the implementation of RP.
- c. The small groups identified the following *concerns*:
- i. There is a lack of guidance or shared understanding in how best to introduce and implement RP in schools;
 - ii. There should be consistent quality to RP training and implementation that demonstrate clear fidelity to restorative principles, including;
 1. Preparation of RP interventions should be thorough;
 2. Facilitators of RP interventions should be skilled;
 3. RP should be used appropriately and only on a voluntary basis (by all participants).
 - iii. Confidentiality questions (around RP) should be explored and clarified;
 - iv. RP should be in alignment with PBIS (not as another add-on to what is already being implemented in schools.)

4. **Resources:** In addition to the above strengths, participants identified the following potential resources in the training and implementation of RP:
 - a. Several participants mentioned *Up With Learning* as a complementary resource for schools implementing RP;
 - b. There is a growth in Vermont-based RP trainings for schools;
 - c. Burlington School District is currently developing a data evaluation process to track the effectiveness of RP.
 - d. BEST was also offered as a potential resource to RP Trainers and Vested Stakeholders.

Whole Group Session: Recommendations

The following is a combined and thematically organized summary of participants' recommendations to strengthen and expand RP Training and Implementation in schools:

1. **Advocacy:** In order to strengthen the environment for school-based RP training and implementation, participants identified a critical need for strategic advocacy at local, regional and state levels. This includes:
 - a. School Boards and Superintendents should give the 'green light' to teachers, principals and schools to support the training and implementation of RP.
 - b. The Secretary of the Agency of Education should publicly express support for:
 - i. The training and implementation of RP in schools;
 - ii. The use of restorative processes and principles in staff meetings, school decision making, staff evaluation/reviews, and teacher collaboration and support during school hours.
 - c. The Governor and Legislature should formally advocate for the (voluntary) implementation of RP in schools.
 - d. The AOE should support a media campaign that promotes community understanding and appreciation of RP (using Vermont stories).
2. **Resources:** Participants identified several resource domains that would strengthen current training and implementation practices. These include:
 - a. Schools should allocate financial resources and staff time for RP training.
 - b. The AOE should equitably allocate financial resources to support (but not mandate) the training and implementation of RP in schools and:
 - i. Should seek to both engage/utilize Vermont's RP trainers and learn from other states' experiences implementing RP.
 - ii. Align service expectations and outcomes with financial resources available.
 - c. The AOE and/or BEST should also support the development and sharing of:
 - i. *A Resource Guide for the Implementation of RP in Schools*;
 - ii. *An Implementation Timeline* that clarifies milestones in the training, introduction and implementation of RP.
 - iii. A Web-Based platform that provides tools, information and training resources that support the implementation of RP.

- d. The AOE and/or BEST should engage their experience and knowledge of ‘scaling up’ and supporting statewide initiatives (such as MTSS) in support of expanding high-quality RP.
3. **Training:** Participants identified several recommendations to enhance the quality, consistency and reach of RP training. These include:
 - a. The AOE should convene RP experts to develop *high quality standards of practice* to ensure consistent training and implementation.
 - b. RP trainings for teachers (and other school staff) should be;
 - i. Sustained throughout the year and with each new school year;
 - ii. Included as a competency in teacher licensure.
 - c. There should be an intentional effort to provide RP training to key stakeholders of schools in order to build understanding and support of RP practices, including:
 - i. Communities;
 - ii. AOE staff;
 - iii. Legislature.
4. **Policy:** Participants listed several local and statewide policies that should be reviewed, updated and/or intentionally aligned with RP. These include:
 - a. *School Quality Standards* should be updated to address and support the emotional and relational needs of students.
 - b. School Boards, Principals should review and update *Model Policies* with a restorative lens.
 - c. The AOE and/or BEST should;
 - i. Provide clear guidance on the alignment between RP and MTSS;
 - ii. Bring *ESSA* and *Educational Quality Reviews* into alignment with RP;
 - iii. Review the NACRJ’s school-based RP policy for potential adoption by the state of Vermont.
 - d. A team of RP experts and practitioners should work to update *Title 16*.
5. **Data Analysis:** Participants indicated that data and research are important components in promoting RP and recommended that the AOE:
 - a. Frame the ‘why’ for supporting RP by sharing current base-line data around drop-out rates, racial and economic disparities in achievement, school exclusions, etc.
 - b. Articulate the expected indicators and outcomes that will occur as a result of the implementation of high-quality RP in schools.
6. **Networking:** Participants recognize that it’s important for Vermont’s RP trainers, implementers and stakeholders to connect with each other. In order to facilitate these connections, the participants offered the following recommendations:
 - a. School Administrators should encourage and support their RP staff to connect with each other across schools and networks.
 - b. There should be local, regional and statewide learning communities for;
 - i. School-based RP trainers and implementers to share resources and information;
 - ii. Stakeholders that support RP initiatives (such as administrators, superintendents, etc.) to address their unique challenges and concerns.

- c. The AOE should designate a representative to Vermont's *Consortium* (a statewide network of Restorative Stakeholders and Practitioners).
- d. Vermont should form a Statewide Taskforce (that is geographically representative) to support RP training and implementation in schools.

APPENDIX #1: ATTENDANCE

First Name	Last Name	School/Org	Email Address
Henri	Sparks	Burl. Sch. Sys.	hsparks@bsdvt.org
Ben	Johnson	Essex HS	benjohnson@ccsuvt.org
Lindsey	Halman	Essex MS	lhalman@etsd.org
Paul	Yoon	Tuttle MS	pyoon@sbschools.net
Renee	Badeau	Harwood HS	rbadeau@wwsu.org
Reed	McKracken	Harwood HS	
Lisa	Beddinger	S. Burl. CJC	lbedinger@sbsdvt.org
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Raquel	Aronhime	Chit. Cty. UW	raquel@unitedwaynwvt.org
Dan	Dewalt	Lel. & Gray HS	1dandewalt@gmail.com
Fowler	Amy	AOE	Amy.Fowler@vermont.gov
Dovid	Yagoda	Colch. MS	Dovid.Yagoda@colchestersd.org
Hunter	Stark	Colch. MS	Hunter.stark@colchestersd.org
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Rob	Thayer	Frankl/GI CJC	rob@FGIRJC.org
Anneke	Hohl	Burlington CJC	anneke@burlingtonvt.gov
Annie	O'Shaughnessy	Essex Tech Ctr.	aoshaughnessy@ccsuvt.org
Sherry	Schoenberg	PBIS	Sherry.Schoenberg@uvm.edu
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Nellie	Haddad	Facilitator	
Nicole	Brownstein	Facilitator	
Marc	Wennberg	Lead Consultant	

APPENDIX #2: AGENDA

Restorative Principles and Practices in Vermont Schools
 Alumni Hall, 3rd Floor, 20 Auditorium Hill, Barre, Vermont
 Thursday, October 13, 2016, 9:30-3:30

Meeting Goals:

1. Identify the infrastructure, scope, reach and effectiveness of current Restorative Practices (RP) training
2. Define best practices and current gaps in RP training and support

3. Clarify additional steps or support that would advance the implementation of high-quality RP training and implementation

Agenda:

1. Welcome: Amy Fowler, Deputy Secretary of Education
2. An Opening Circle: Setting Intentions and Purpose for the Day
3. Understanding the Intersection of Restorative Practices and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Jon Kidde and Sherry Schoenberg
4. Aspirational Visions: Small Group Work to Identify High-Quality Training, Support and Outcomes for Restorative Schools
5. LUNCH (Bring or purchase your own)
6. Current Context: Small Group Work to Explore Current Training, Support and Outcomes in Vermont's Current Educationally-Based Restorative Practices
7. Moving Forward: Identifying Potential Next Steps to Strengthen High-Quality Training and Support of Educationally-Based Restorative Practices
8. Closing Circle

APPENDIX #3: Survey Form

Name of School:

Is this:

- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

In which County is this school located:

Type of RP Currently Being Implemented (Circle all that apply):

- Circles
- Panels
- Conferences
- Other

Which Tier is Impacted by Restorative Practice Initiative (Circle all that apply):

- Tier 1: General Culture and Climate
- Tier 2: Addressing Wrongdoing
- Tier 3: Supporting Reintegration

Who is providing training:

Who is providing administrative support: