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Soukterannie P. Rith

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Restorative Justice Partners, Inc.--Arleen Ortiz De La Peña

Collaborative Health & Human Services

Department of Health, Human Services and Public Policy

California State University Monterey Bay

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Author Note

Soukterannie P Rith, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State University Monterey Bay. This research was supported by Restorative Justice Partners, Inc. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Soukterannie P Rith, California State University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA, 93955. Contact: srith@csumb.edu

Abstract

Exclusionary methods of discipline ostracize students from their peers, teachers, and school community. Student misbehavior, lack of capacity to implement restorative justice methods, and office discipline referrals all contribute to the rise in the use of exclusionary discipline. The Restorative Justice in the Schools program serves Monterey County K-12 schools and offers administrators and teachers alternatives to exclusionary methods. They aim to address the consequences of exclusion, including adverse student outcomes, repeated offenses, and a lack of accountability and empathy. This capstone project measured outcomes of Restorative Justice in the Schools' services. The purpose was to expose the benefits of restorative justice methods through community-based research. The expected outcome was a 75% positive rating on services. The results met the predicted outcome and supported reduced student misbehavior, relationship building, and classroom management skills. Recommendations include whole-school implementation, addressing repeat offenses, and creating hands-on activities.

Keywords: Restorative Justice, Restoring school conflict

Agencies and Communities Served

Founded in 1987, Restorative Justice Partners, Inc. is a nonprofit organization based in Marina, California. The agency's mission is to work with those affected by conflict, providing support and education to encourage accountability, empathy, and reparation. The Restorative Justice in the Schools program's vision is that school communities are committed to building and repairing relationships to create and sustain safe learning environments. Services include building classroom Respect Agreements, Effective Communication presentations, Mediations, and Community Building/Solution Finding circles provided to the whole school community. Explicitly for staff and administration, there is additional workshop training on Restorative Justice resources, services, and tools. The population served is Monterey County K-12 schools. Within the three school districts that are this project's focus is a significant Hispanic/Latino population, averaging 80% of the community served (MCOE, 2019-20).

Problem Model Background & Literature

Problem Statement

The increase in exclusionary methods within Monterey Peninsula Unified School District schools has affected both RJP, Inc and the community it serves. Primarily it affects the students, teachers, and administrators within the schools. An increase in exclusionary methods causes adverse student outcomes and unsustainable practices in response to conflict. For example, Gage et al. (2020) found that students missed 760,000 days of instruction due to exclusions such as timeouts, office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Combined with the continuing effects of the global pandemic, this may only increase as school communities navigate responses to student misbehavior.

The increase in exclusionary methods has affected students' academic performance and sense of belonging in schools. Luster (2018) notes that there has been no positive effect on student behavior or the feeling of safety in a school community due to exclusionary discipline. Instead, students are met with feeling alienated from their peers, and staff must navigate working with students at different academic levels. As a result, an added layer of navigating these consequences becomes another issue to address on top of the initial factor for discipline. Exclusionary methods are a temporary solution to the more significant issue that affects all involved in a school community.

Contributing Factors

Student Misbehavior

A component of this issue is the display of student misbehavior in classrooms. As such, teachers and administrators are trained to report this behavior and respond accordingly. Response methods include detention, office discipline referrals, suspension, and expulsion. These methods share this concept of excluding students from their classrooms and school communities. Pas(2011) noted that disruptive behaviors were heavily linked to office discipline referrals and used to monitor school-wide research and decision-making. Unfortunately, the intentions of this outlet have shown no attempts at addressing student misbehavior or repairing harm.

Lack of Restorative Methods

An additional factor is the lack of restorative methods in response to student misbehavior. Restorative methods encourage empathy, accountability, and reparation in regards to the harm that was caused. Unfortunately, the educational system was built on traditional methods of excluding students from their classrooms and school communities, creating a lost dialogue opportunity. Gregory et al. (2018) noted that, although the idea of restorative methods in

response to school discipline has an extensive history, the lack of research has deterred schools from implementation. As a result, restorative methods' benefits have yet to be introduced to many schools that may change how they respond to misbehavior as a community.

Office Discipline Referrals

Office discipline referrals are used to document student misbehavior to remove a student from the classroom and into the office for disciplinary action. While these forms are a way of moving forward with class instruction, the student who has been removed lacks the understanding of how their behavior may affect the classroom environment. Due to its exclusionary nature, these referrals lack substance in creating a school community. It also teaches students that their misbehavior is a way to receive attention and escape potentially overwhelming classroom material. There is a lack of accountability, empathy, and harm in the actions that have initially caused them to be removed from the classroom or school community.

Consequences

Adverse Student Outcomes

An increase in school exclusionary methods leads to poor student outcomes as they are removed from their classroom community. Pulling students out of classrooms using detention, suspension, or expulsion disrupts their learning experience resulting in missed instruction. These practices are not designed for sustainability but rather a moment of isolation from their peers and learning environments. Morrison et al. (2001) noted that these exclusionary practices are a part of a preventive school-wide plan but provide no guidance on how it is a part of the learning and improvement process. This issue affects the students who are experiencing the exclusionary measures and the teachers themselves as they cannot identify what is taught through these methods.

Poor School Climate & Culture

The issue also robs students, teachers, and administration of an opportunity to learn about the student's misconduct or misbehavior and how it affects their school community. The current discipline procedures result in a lack of connectedness, respect, and safety. Gazeley et al. (2013) found that it was challenging to reintegrate a student from suspension due to how school curriculums are built. Students returning from suspension are expected to be up to par with their peers, and teachers are expected to continue the class as planned. The difficulty of reintegration affects the student's ability to connect with peers and may require additional academic support.

Repeat Offenses

Repeat offenses are similar to those who recidivate into the criminal justice system. There is a lack of rehabilitation for the offender and a lack of accountability from the offender. Similarly, in a school context, students who are disciplined for their misbehavior are merely excluded from their school communities without dialogue about how their harm affects their peers, classroom, and school community. There is no opportunity to learn from their behaviors, resulting in a lack of understanding of how behaviors may be changed to create a more positive school climate and culture. As a result, repeat offenses are treated with unsustainable and inequitable exclusionary practices.

Problem Model Diagram

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
● Student misbehavior ● Lack of role capacity ● Office discipline referrals	Increase in exclusionary methods in Monterey County K-12 schools	● Repeated offenses ● Adverse student outcomes ● Lack of positive school climate and culture

Capstone Project Description

I proposed an evaluation report on Restorative Justice in the Schools program outcomes. I evaluated the effects of the resources, services, and tools provided to Monterey County K-12 schools using data collection methods and survey analysis. It measured the usefulness, effects, and general outcomes of the services. The project explored the lack of capacity to implement restorative methods. The project addressed this issue by providing community-based research on current partnerships' experiences with restorative implementation on their site. The purpose was to expose the philosophy of restorative justice, the program's successes, and its benefits. The evaluation report supported RJP, Inc in the data collection and outcomes as it revealed a need for implementation in school communities. It also supported Monterey Peninsula Unified School District schools through its implementation of restorative justice practices, tools, and services and its direct success in repairing harm and conflict.

Project Justification

The methodology in carrying out this project led to reliable and desired results by gaining direct and alterable data and evaluation. Participants were given a survey that they were encouraged to answer based on their experiences and specifically requested services. Through experience and testing, this project met best-practice standards as it is entirely unbiased and community-based data and evaluation. The accumulated data was calculated through Google Form's data programming tools. These techniques supplied the project with reliable data and desired project results.

Project Description and Implementation Process

The first step in implementing the project was to provide services to the community. It included Workshops (one to four) and tiers one to three on-site support. The next step was creating contact sheets on every service the Restorative Justice in the Schools team, which I had facilitated or provided. Then, I developed the program evaluation survey. It included creating the questions, reviewing them with my mentor and executive director, going through the approval process, and sending it out to those who have received services. Lastly, I analyzed the program's outcomes by referring to the survey results.
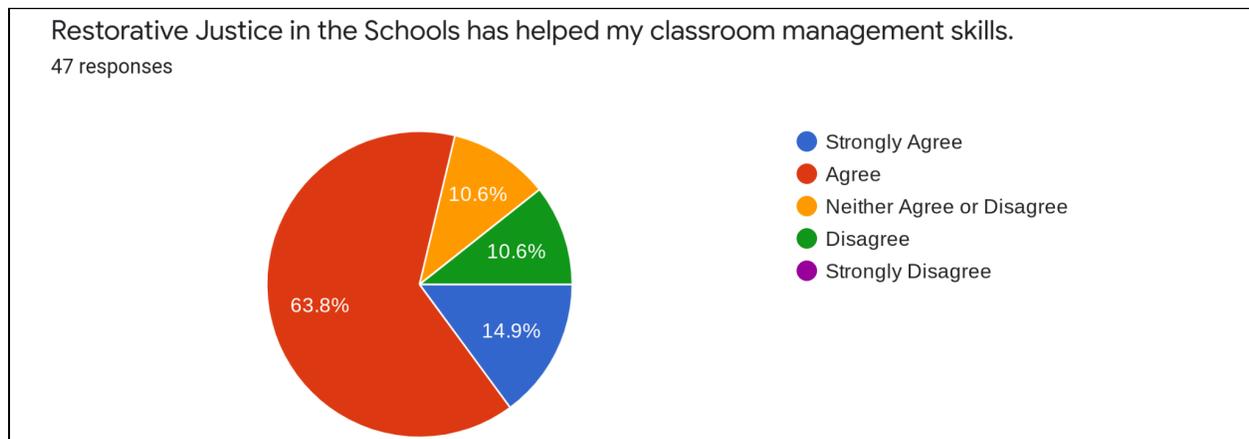
The project included collaboration with the Restorative Justice in the Schools team, its executive director, mentor, and partnering schools. The RJ in the Schools team supported with facilitating workshop training and Tiers one to three on-site support. My mentor and executive director supported developing and approving the survey. Lastly, partnering schools were supportive by carrying out the services and evaluating the outcomes of restorative methods. I utilized my project implementation plan to track my progress and the Restorative Justice in the Schools program survey, located in the Appendix.
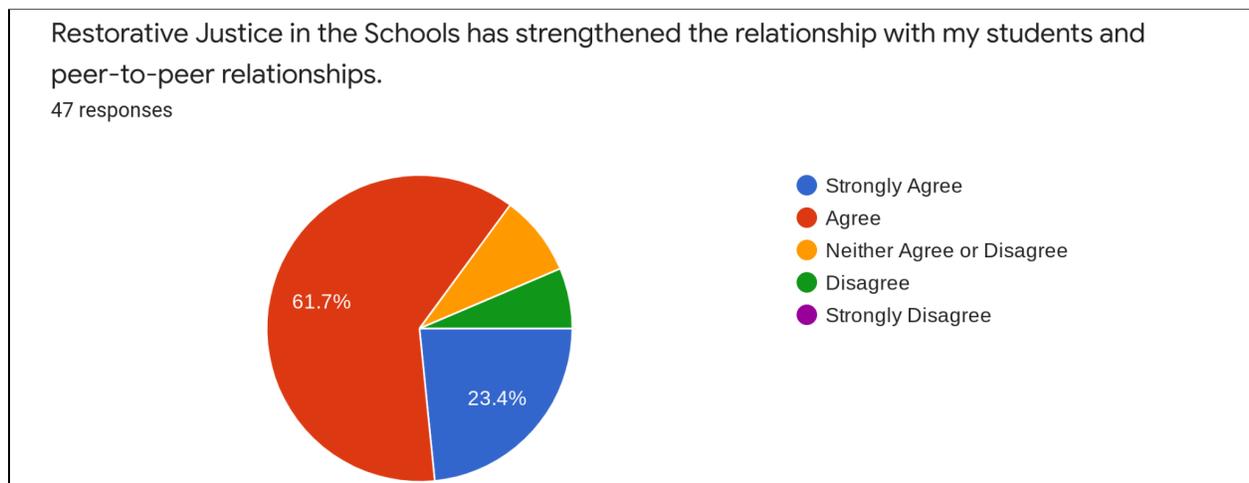
Project Results

The activities to carry out this project included facilitating Restorative Justice in the Schools services, developing the survey, sending out the survey, and analyzing the results. To measure the project's success, I determined a baseline of 75% positive outcomes rating within my three indicators. The three indicators included reduced student misbehavior, improved classroom management, and strengthened relationships. These indicators are within the program's vision to create and sustain learning environments. Finally, the baseline and indicators were used to measure the project's potential success.

As a result of the project, I produced community-based research on the outcomes of restorative methods in schools. Of the 105 participants surveyed, 47 responded, which produced nearly a 45% response rate. The project achieved the expected outcome as the three indicators I used (reduced student misbehavior, improved classroom management, and strengthened relationships) exceeded the 75% positive rating baseline. These results were achieved by sending out the surveys daily and requesting survey feedback from community members who were provided Restorative Justice in the Schools services. The overall satisfaction of the service provided was also asked, which concluded with an 83% satisfaction rate.
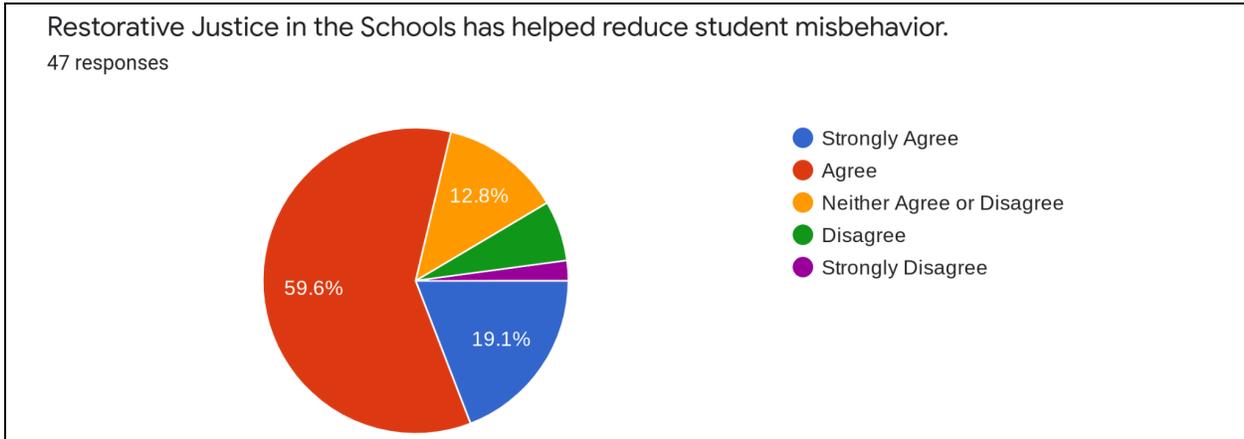
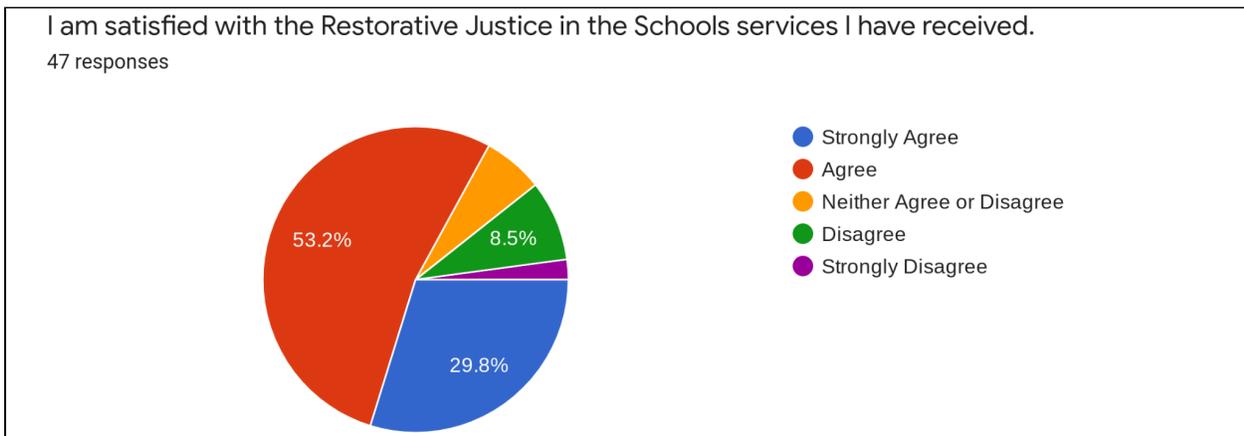**Table 1. Classroom Management Skills**

Table 2. Strengthened Relationships

Table 3. Student Misbehavior

Restorative Justice in the Schools has helped reduce student misbehavior.
47 responses

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12.8%
59.6%
19.1%

Table 4. Satisfaction of Services

I am satisfied with the Restorative Justice in the Schools services I have received.
47 responses

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

53.2%
8.5%
29.8%

Conclusion & Recommendations

The project has provided evidence that restorative methods have profoundly impacted those who have utilized these methods rather than exclusionary methods. The results have shown a more connected classroom and school community and reduced student misbehavior. The results support continued research as we have seen by negative results that time frame was a factor. With additional time to work with affected students, staff, and administration, the effects of restorative methods will have the opportunity to make changes toward a positive school climate and culture. There were adverse effects due to the services; rather, there was not enough time allotted to those who needed support.

As a result of this project, I recommend more time allotted to each partnered school for Tiers one to three on-site support. Several survey responses included conflicting schedules that caused an inability to receive services. By including more time, these staff members will have more opportunities to experience restorative services in their classrooms. An additional recommendation would be implementing a whole school approach when introducing restorative methods. Not all staff members within a school site are trained in restorative methods, which deters the impact these methods could have on a school community. Encouraging all staff and administration to attend restorative training would promote autonomy and stability in maintaining classroom management.

Final Reflection

The research and capstone project focused on the building blocks of a positive school climate and culture. It has shown that student misbehavior, poor classroom management skills, and a lack of relationships within classrooms directly impacts a connected school community. Creating an environment in which students are given a sustainable and restorative method to discipline creates positive outcomes on their behaviors, relationships with their teachers and peers, as well as a teacher's ability to manage their classroom. Carrying out this project through my field experience has increased my knowledge and skills to address conflict restoratively and equitably through a case by case basis. As it focuses on evaluation, it has shown to be a resourceful tool for collaboration and feedback on how to improve an agency's services and best meet a community's needs.

Appendix

Scope of Work

RJ in the Schools Evaluation Report		Soukterannie P Rith		
Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/Services Needed	Completed Product
Facilitate Services	Ongoing/ By April 15, 2022	Soukterannie, Mentor, RJ in the Schools Case Coordinators, Schools Administration and Staff	Paper, Markers, Google Doc, Talking Piece, Powerpoint Presentation	Meeting Minutes
Create Contact Sheet Spreadsheet	Ongoing/ By April 15, 2022	Soukterannie, Mentor, RJ in the Schools Case Coordinators	Google Sheets	Quantitative Data
Fill out Contact Sheet after services	Ongoing/ By April 15, 2022	Soukterannie, Mentor, RJ in the Schools Case Coordinators	Google Docs	Quantitative Data
Develop Evaluation Survey	By March 21, 2022	Soukterannie, Mentor, Executive Director	Google Forms	Evaluation Survey
Evaluation Survey Approval	By March 31, 2022	Soukterannie, Mentor, Executive Director, Capstone Instructor	Google Forms	Evaluation Survey
Send Survey	By April 1, 2022	Soukterannie	Gmail	Qualitative/Quantitative Data
Create Contact Survey Spreadsheet	By April 1, 2022	Soukterannie	Google Sheets	Qualitative/Quantitative Data
Evaluate & Analyze data	By April 15, 2022	Soukterannie	Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Forms	Qualitative/Quantitative Data
Create PowerPoint Presentation	By April 21, 2022	Soukterannie	Google Slides, Google Sheets, Google Docs	Evaluation Report Rough Draft

Finalize Evaluation report	By April 21, 2022	Soukterannie	Google Slides, Google Sheets, Google Docs	Evaluation Report

RJ in the Schools Evaluation Survey

Restorative Justice in the Schools Program Evaluation

How has RJ in the Schools resources, services, and tools impacted you and your school community? Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. This is a part of a CSUMB student Capstone project. Thank you in advance for your participation and feedback!

srith@csumb.edu Switch account

* Required

Email *

Your email

First & Last Name *

Your answer

What school site do you work for? *

Please check all services that you and/or your classroom has received. *

☐ Respect Agreement

☐ Community Building Circle

☐ Solution Finding Circle

☐ Effective Communication

☐ Mediation

☐ Peer Mediation Training

☐ Workshop 1: Respect Agreement (Professional Development)

☐ Workshop 2: Mediation & Thinkery (Professional Development)

☐ Workshop 3: Circles (Professional Development)

☐ Workshop 4: Mediation & Circles Practice/Review (Professional Development)

☐ Other:

Restorative Justice in the Schools has helped reduce student misbehavior. *

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neither Agree or Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Restorative Justice in the Schools has helped my classroom management skills. *

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neither Agree or Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Restorative Justice in the Schools has strengthened the relationship with my students and peer-to-peer relationships. *

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neither Agree or Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

I am satisfied with the Restorative Justice in the Schools services I have received. *

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neither Agree or Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Please further explain how Restorative Justice in the Schools resources, services, and tools have impacted you, the reintegrated student, your classroom, and/or the overall school community. *

Your answer

What can be done to improve Restorative Justice in the Schools at your school site? Please list any/all suggestions. *

Your answer

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