PBIS Forum in Brief:
Integration of RJP within SWPBIS

Introduction

Restorative Justice Practices (RJP) are being widely adopted by schools and districts across the country with strong endorsement coming from local and national education organizations for their use. For instance, the National Education Association (NEA), the Justice Center of the Council of State Governments *School Discipline Consensus Report* (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014), the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Right Division and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights all recommended the adoption and implementation of restorative practices as an effective and more culturally sensitive school discipline approach. Interestingly, the wide endorsement of restorative practices in schools and districts has outpaced the research in this area making it necessary to continue to investigate the efficacy of restorative discipline policies.

Defined and goals

Although increasingly prominent in the educational setting, Restorative Justice originated in the justice sector (Bazemore & Griffiths, 1997) as "a problem-solving approach to crime that focuses on restoration or repairing the harm done by the crime and criminal to the extent possible, and involves the victim(s), offender(s) and the community in an active relationship with statutory agencies in developing a resolution." (United Nations, 2003, p. 28). Within the school setting, RJP have been conceptualized and implemented as a hierarchy of proactive and reactive strategies (Blood & Thorsborn, 2005; Morrison 2007). As such, RJP provides students and teachers alike with proactive methods and procedures for responding to issues of school discipline.

The goal of implementing RJP in schools is to develop climates that promote understanding and inclusion across all members of the school community. The emphasis within RJP is placed on the restoration of personal relationships rather than on more traditional punitive discipline practices that can reduce student and teacher morale and increase the risk of disenfranchising students through suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary referrals. Specifically, RJP consists of a set of practices that are designed to re-engage youth at risk of academic failure and entry into the juvenile justice system through dialogue-driven, restorative responses to misbehavior which hold youth accountable for their actions through repairing harm and making amends and includes the persons who have harmed, been harmed, as well as others within their surrounding school communities in restorative responses to school misconduct (Gonsoulin, Schiff, & Hatheway, 2013).

RJP within SWPBIS

School discipline through the RJP lens shifts the focus from exclusionary discipline to restitution and repair of the harm and relationships (Smith, Schneider, Smith & Ananiadou, 2004). It is a philosophical match to SWPBIS, which has the goal of reducing exclusionary discipline, and maximizing instructional engagement. However, as endorsements emerge from various state and national groups, there is not yet a widely disseminated model for the integration of RJP and SWPBIS, including lack of fidelity treatment. Swain-Bradway and colleagues (Swain-Bradway, Eber, Sprague and Nelson, 2016) have suggested a model for the integration of RJP within SWPBIS, (see Figure 1) but larger scale replication, and evaluation has yet to occur.

Jessica Swain-Bradway, Midwest PBIS Network; Daniel M. Maggin Molly K. Buren, University of Illinois at Chicago

RJP roundtable purpose

To begin building the model for alignment and evaluation, the purpose of the *Restorative Justice Practices* (RJP) within *School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports* (SWPBIS) roundtable was to investigate issues surrounding the adoption and implementation of RJP for schools already implementing SWPBIS. Specifically, we were interested in information from school and district personnel that would provide early guidelines for implementation. The specific issues addressed within the roundtable included: (a) the reasons school and district personnel adopted RJP; (b) the perceived benefits of RJP over and above other school discipline frameworks; and (c) the challenges that schools have identified in the early stages of implementation of RJP.
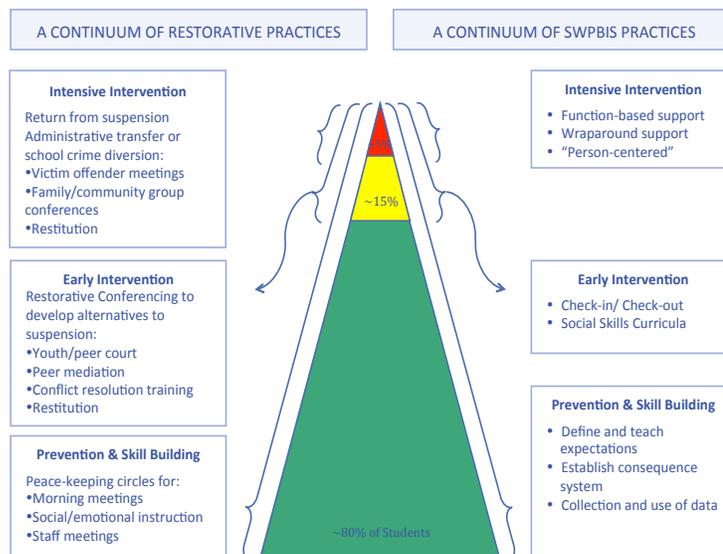

Figure 1. A continuum of RJP and SWPBIS Practices (Swain-Bradway, Eber, Sprague, & Nelson, 2016).

RJP roundtable methods

In order to understand these issues, we conducted eight (8) interviews prior to the *PBIS Leadership Forum* with school and district personnel engaged in the installation of RJP within their schools. The interviewees included 2 assistant principals, 3 district level administrators, and 3 district-level PBIS coaches. All interviewees represented districts that had been implementing SWPBIS for at least 2 years (range of 2-9 years) and had attended at least one RJP training from a local provider. Additionally all interviewees represented districts that (a) had SWPBIS coaches within their district or school, (b) were conducting no fewer than one annual assessments of SWPBIS fidelity, and (c) provided ongoing professional development in SWPBIS to all staff. The interviews consisted of seven (7) open-ended questions:

1. What were the reasons that prompted your district to seek out and ultimately adopt restorative justice practices?
2. What were one or two of the most important reasons for selecting RJP as opposed to other discipline programs?
3. So, going along with that but looking at it differently, approaching it differently, what were some of the outcomes or behaviors that you anticipated RJ being able to address over and above other school discipline programs?
4. As you went through the process of adopting restorative justice for your schools, what were some of the characteristics of the strategies that seemed to align with the needs of your school district?
5. In your district's experience, what have been some of the challenges with implementing restorative justice at the school level?
6. In your district's experience, what have been some of the factors that have facilitated successful

Jessica Swain-Bradway, Midwest PBIS Network; Daniel M. Maggin Molly K. Buren, University of Illinois at Chicago

> implementation of restorative justice practices?
>
> 7. Do you have anything else you want to add or do you have questions of your own?

The eight interviews were used as a basis for generating questions to pose to the *Forum* participants, with the goal of gaining a wider perspective on the issues of selection and implementation of RJP within SWPBIS. Due to time constraints, we presented three questions only to the roundtable discussion groups. The three open questions were:

> 1. For what reasons did your district decide to adopt RJP?
> 2. What are the perceived benefits?
> 3. What were (are) the top three obstacles to implementation?

Data collected during the *Forum* included (a) discussion responses to the open-ended group questions, and (b) written responses to questionnaires, that included the same three questions, completed by the attendees. Graduate level observers for each of the six discussion groups documented discussion notes. Key findings for each of these three questions are summarized below.

Reasons to adopt

Results from the pre-*Forum* interview revealed that school and district personnel were prompted to adopt RJP for a variety of reasons though a common rationale was to change school climates. The administrators emphasized the general belief that RJP can potentially create more equity in discipline practices by presenting and implementing an alternative mindset to zero-tolerance policies. Consequently, there is a general belief in the ability of RJP to reduce suspensions and present a different, more effective type of accountability. Administrators vocalized a commitment to improving relationships amongst students, teachers, and staff with the hope of repairing harm and creating a sense of belonging for all people in the building through RJP. Finally, district and school administrators found RJP not only aligns with the desire to decrease punitive measures and negative behaviors, it further aligns with the fundamental principles of SWPBIS: safety, respect, and responsibility.

Results from the *Forum* questionnaire and discussion notes mirrored many of the findings from the pre-*Forum* interviews with a heavy emphasis on the relationship between RJP and SWPBIS. Participants described RJP adoption as essential in creating stronger communities in their schools, as an avenue to build relationships amongst students and staff, and as a conduit to change in efforts to increase equity. A final reason to adopt RJP that emerged from the *Forum* discussions is the desire to develop a better understanding of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness in schools by embracing student voice, giving ownership, and helping students feel like valuable members of the community.

Perceived benefits

Data from the pre-*Forum* interviews outlined three central, perceived benefits to the adoption of RJP. Findings show that interviewees perceived a positive school-wide paradigm shift results from RJP implementation that (a) builds relationships through constructive conversations, and consistent, common language; (b) creates positive climates and cultures through the establishment of common practices such as peace circles and alternate routes to disciplinary resolution; and (c) is most effective when implemented throughout the whole school. Administrators repeatedly emphasized the transformational nature of RJP and its ability to challenge traditional school discipline models with the goal of increasing equity in schools.

Jessica Swain-Bradway, Midwest PBIS Network; Daniel M. Maggin Molly K. Buren, University of Illinois at Chicago

PBIS Forum in Brief:
Integration of RJP within SWPBIS

Synonymous with the findings from the pre-*Forum* interviews, data results from the roundtable sessions highlights similar perceived benefits of RJP. The data suggests RJP builds relationships and community, reinforces restorative versus punitive discipline practices as teaching tools and stepping-stones towards a more equitable school climate. Interviewees stressed that RJP must be implemented throughout the entire school to increase fidelity and successful outcomes. In addition, *Forum* attendees discussed how RJP is easily incorporated into all three tiers of SWPBIS, holds students and staff accountable for their actions through structured, concrete models, and ultimately empowers and engages kids through the process. An attendee clearly illuminated the interdependent relationship between RJP and student empowerment when claiming, "*RJP provides clarity and structure for deeper growth and learning so the student is able to expand their realm of understanding, have a platform for discussing what they experienced and learn to trust their voice*".

Implementation challenges

Repeatedly, throughout both pre-*Forum* interviews and *Forum* roundtable discussions, the concept of mindset work surfaced as an overarching challenge to the implementation of RJP in schools. A major component of mindset work is the notion of buy-in. Pre-*Forum* findings indicated that challenges to successful implementation of RJP included the lack of school and family readiness and awareness of RJP philosophies and practices, and general buy-in from the school community to be the main challenges to implementation of RJP.

According to the interviewees, to overcome the challenges of resistance and limited buy-in, the critical work of education and training for all staff, systematized implementation that starts small and builds, encouragement of targeted teachers to join RJP committees, and top-down, administrative support must occur for mindsets to transform.

Results from the *Forum* roundtable discussions and questionnaires uncover similar challenges to successful implementation of RJP that are seen with the implementation of other school wide practices . Furthermore, the findings illustrate how pre-existing biases about students and behaviors contribute to teacher and staff buy-in with limited time and resources to properly train and implement RJP contribute to the problem. In several questionnaires, the term consistency surfaced as a major challenge and was used in a variety of contexts. Examples included references to the consistency in training school personnel to implement RJP methods, the need for consistency across faculty and students alike in understanding the RJP framework, and the need to implement the core practices with fidelity and consistency across school and district settings. Lastly, many *Forum* participants circled back to the concept of integration of RJP into SWPBIS as a major roadblock to implementation. Specifically, many noted that successful adoption and implementation of RJP requires teachers to view the initiative as an extension of SWPBIS that works in tandem with the broader framework of data, systems, and practices rather than as another program that teacher are mandated to use.

Implications for implementation

The information gathered through the interviews provided some insights into the processes of adopting and implementing RJP within SWPBIS. Their feedback reflects the reliance on the principles of implementation science to guide the adoption and implementation of RJP into the SWPBIS framework. Many themes identified under **Reasons to Adopt**, **Perceived Benefits** and **Implementation Challenges** require district support, school-wide application, team-based implementation, data-driven progress monitoring, and consistent application of practices.

Jessica Swain-Bradway, Midwest PBIS Network; Daniel M. Maggin Molly K. Buren, University of Illinois at Chicago

PBIS Forum in Brief:
Integration of RJP within SWPBIS

One of the most common themes that emerged under both **Reasons to Adopt** and **Perceived Benefits** was the goal and / or perception that RJP, when implemented within SWPBIS, increases equity of the school environment, specifically disciplinary practices and systems. This theme is also present in the endorsements from the NEA, Justice Center of the Council of State Governments *School Discipline Consensus Report*, and the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. While the perception that RJP contributes to more equitable schools has high social validity, this is an empirical question that has yet to be answered.

SWPBIS provides a strong precedent for evaluation of outcomes and data-driven problem solving to meet valued outcome goals. Several themes pulled from **Reasons to Adopt** and **Perceived Benefits** can be measured through school-level data, either disciplinary data or climate surveys to students, staff and families: (a) Improved relationships, (b) Changed school climates, (c) Reduce suspensions, (d) Decrease punitive measures, (e) Equitable discipline.

The themes identified in **Implementation Challenges**, such as lack of buy-in, training of staff can also be addressed within the SWPBIS framework through (a) development of a coaching cohort, (b) establishing ongoing professional development calendar, (c) active planning to address staff concerns around buy-in, and (d) data sharing.

A related challenge to implementation noted by interviewees was alignment and integration of RJP within SWPBIS. Again, the field of SWPBIS provides a model for this alignment and expansion. The Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) provides an example of expanding the practices and supports available to students by integrating mental health practices into the systems, data, and practices within a school setting. This expansion requires inclusion of mental health providers on school teams, expanded data including community and student risk factors, in addition to expanded professional development and implementation of a range of practices at Tiers 1, 2, and 3 with the goals of mental health promotion and reduction of the impact of mental health disorders on school success and quality of life. For full treatment of the ISF please see **Resources** section below.

The interviewee responses to **Implementation Challenges** suggest that the alignment and integration of RJP within the SWPBIS would benefit from following the ISF model of expansion. The ISF model assures that the expertise of the mental health providers becomes an integral part of the systems, data and practices within the school resulting in consistent application of the practices (Swain-Bradway, Johnson, Barrett, Eber, & Weist). Interviewees identified consistency as one of the major implementation challenges, notably: (a) consistency in training, (b) staff understanding of RJP framework, implementation, and (c) fidelity across schools.

Fidelity

While none of the interviewees noted fidelity alone as an implementation challenge, most of them identified that achieving the perceived benefits of RJP implementation were dependent upon school-wide fidelity of implementation. Fidelity of RJP within SWPBIS is a challenging issue for the field, as we do not yet have guidelines that have been assessed for content or construct validity. Fidelity of RJP is missing component in the endorsements of the strategies.

The Minnesota Department of Education has developed a Restorative Interventions and Implementation toolkit (Beckman, McMorris & Gower, 2012) that provides some guidance for fidelity in the form of self-assessments. The handbook does not organize the fidelity assessment to measure systems, data or practice qualities in the manner of SWPBIS fidelity assessments.

Jessica Swain-Bradway, Midwest PBIS Network; Daniel M. Maggin Molly K. Buren, University of Illinois at Chicago

PBIS Forum in Brief:
Integration of RJP within SWPBIS

In keeping within the SWPBIS logic, implementers should assess systems, data and practices by (a) utilizing a SWPBIS fidelity measure, such as the Tiered Fidelity Inventory, (b) clearly defining the specific RJP practices that will be implemented, and (c) clearly defining when and by whom these practices will be used. In collaboration with the RJP trainer and / or local provider the implementing school teams can create checklists that can be used for both self-assessment, as well as observation by coach, administrator or RJP provider.

Summary

RJP has high social validity, but is lacking clear guidance from the RJP on how to align and implement with SWPBIS. The interviews are a starting point for this process. We recommend using the logic of SWPBIS to (a) align the desired RJP practices with the SWPBIS logic, (b) expand the current systems, data and practices within a school to include RJP, and (c) assess the fidelity and impact of RJP practices.

Resources

- Advancing Education Effectiveness: Interconnecting School Mental Health and School-wide Positive Behavior Support
- Minnesota Department of Education, Restorative Practices Resources, N. Riestenberg
- RJP in SWPBIS, recorded webinars, hosted by Midwest PBIS Network
- Restorative Practices, Healthier San Francisco Unified School District
- US Departments of Justice and Education Joint "Dear Colleague" Letter on school discipline

References

Bazemore, G., and Griffiths, C. 1997. Conferences, circles, boards, and mediations:
        The "new wave" of community justice decision-making. Federal Probation 61(2): 25-37.

Beckman, K. McMorris, B. & Gower, A. (2012). Restorative Interventions
        Implementation Toolkit. University of Minnesota Healthy Youth development Prevention Research
        Center.   Retrieved on Jan 11, 2016 from
        http://www.med.umn.edu/peds/ahm/programs/hyd/home.html

Morrison, B., Blood, P., & Thorsborne, M. (2005). Practicing restorative justice in school
        communities: Addressing the challenge of culture change. Public Organization Review, 5(4), 335-357.

Eber, L., Barrett, S., Weist, M.D. (2013). Advancing education effectiveness: An
        interconnected systems framework for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and
        School Mental Health. Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (funded by the
        Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education). Eugene, Oregon, University
        of Oregon Press.

Eber, L. & Swain-Bradway, J. (2014). Integrating Restorative Practices & SW PBIS

Jessica Swain-Bradway, Midwest PBIS Network; Daniel M. Maggin Molly K. Buren, University of Illinois at Chicago

Webinar. Midwest PBIS Network. Retrieved January 11th, 2016 from
http://www.midwestpbis.org/events/webinar-recordings

Gonsoluin, S., Schiff, M., & Hatheway, M. (April, 2013). Restorative Practices: Applying
Restorative Justice Practices in the Juvenile Justice and Education Systems Webinar. Technical
Assistance Partnership, US Departments of Justice, Education, and Health and Human Services.

Morgan, E., Salomon, N., Plotkin, M., & Cohen, R. (2014). The school discipline
consensus report: Strategies from the field to keep students engaged in school and out of the juvenile
justice system. The Council of State Governments Justice Center: June, 4, 112.

Morrison, B. (2007). Schools and restorative justice. Handbook of restorative justice,
325-350.

National Education Association, American Federation of Teacher, National Opportunity
to Learn Campaign, and Advancement Project (2014). Restorative Practices: Fostering healthy
relationships & promoting positive discipline in schools, A guide for educators. Retrieved Jan 11
2016 from http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf

Smith, J. D., Schneider, B. H., Smith, P. K., & Ananiadou, K. (2004). The effectiveness
of whole-school antibullying programs: A synthesis of evaluation research. School Psychology
Review, 33, 547-560.

Swain-Bradway, J., Eber, L., Sprague, J., and Nelson, M. (2016) Restorative Justice
Practices in School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support: A model for alignment and
evaluation. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Swain-Bradway, J., Johnson, J., Eber, L., Barrett, S, & Weist, M. (2014). Interconnections
school mental health and School-wide Positive Behavior Support. In S. Kutcher, Y. Wei, & M. Weist
(Eds.), International School Mental Health for Adolescents – Global Opportunities and Challenges.
London: Cambridge University Press.

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Right Division and U.S. Department Education, Office
for Civil Rights. (2014). Joint "Dear Colleague Letter. Retrieved March 22, 2014 from
http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html