

Integrating Restorative Strategies with Positive Behavior Support:

The Sarasota County School District Initiative

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Project Overview

The Sarasota County School District Initiative, Integrating Restorative Strategies with Positive Behavior Support (PBS), was developed to help teachers and administration create a safe school environment through the techniques of restorative practices. This program has served 331 teachers in multiple Sarasota county public elementary schools. This program was designed to be a component of the larger positive behavior support in use at the district. This combination of tools will promote academic success and decrease problematic behavior within the school environment. This report is an evaluation of the initial Restorative Practices Project which occurred between 2014-2016 in Sarasota County Public Schools.

Restorative Strategies

Restorative strategies was implemented in Sarasota County public schools to enhance the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) already in use for several years. PBS is a set of practices which recognizing and reinforcing appropriate behavior thereby reducing the number of students exhibiting serious behavior problems. Restorative strategies was developed to help teachers and administrators establish a safe school environment, promote academic engagement, and reduce inappropriate behavior. This is done through the use of specific restorative strategies that can be incorporated into their daily work. The final goal is that through the use of these strategies there will be an increase students' attendance, a reduction in school suspension and referrals and a decrease in problematic behaviors such as bullying. Restorative strategies addresses problems that could stunt the growth of students but instead allows these problems to be addressed in a

safe way, so all children are able to reach their full potential within their school community. The concept of restorative strategies comes from the idea of restorative justice, a concept developed in the criminal justice field. Restorative justice is the idea that offenders are held accountable for their actions, instead of just being punished. Offenders are held accountable for their crimes by encountering the people or communities they have harmed face-to-face. The research in restorative justice yields positive results for not only offenders but victims as well. Research also shows a reduction in reoffending, once completing the restorative justice process. Research has shown that the use of restorative practices in schools has resulted in significant improvements in behavior and the school environment. Restorative strategies in schools also help build community, civic engagement, and relationships. It allows adults to do things with students, rather than to them or for them.

In the Sarasota County Public School system, restorative strategies are being used to: establish a safe learning environment, increase student engagement, address potential proactively, teach empathy, extend academic instruction, solve whole group and small group problems and select appropriate alternatives to out-of-school suspension. Restorative strategies are used through circles in the classroom. There are four circles adopted by the Sarasota County School District-wide initiative: community- building/ proactive RS circles, academic RS circles, responsive (targeted) RS circles and restorative meetings.

Restorative Strategies Training

The Fall 2015 and Winter/Spring 2016 trainings consisted of three sessions, a total of nine hours of face-to-face training and seven hours of practicum. Trainings were provided by a district program specialist, five guidance counselors and a fifth grade teacher. Trainings were

attended by elementary school teachers, several guidance counselors and three administrators. A total of 306 participants completed Tier I training and were a combination of elementary school teachers and elementary school counselors. A total of 36 participants completed Restorative Meeting training and all district AP's. The trainings took place in multiple locations: The District Central Office at the Landings, Alta Vista Elementary, Toledo Blade Elementary, Brentwood Elementary, Bayhaven Elementary, Garden Elementary and Glenallen Elementary.

Table 1
Number of Participants at Training Site

Training Sites	Number of Participants
The Landings	112
Alta Vista Elementary	65
Toledo Blade Elementary	34
Brentwood Elementary	36
Bay Haven Elementary	34
Garden Elementary	30
Glenallen Elementary	20

Throughout the training the participants learned the different restorative strategies circles and how to implement them into the classrooms. The four circles yield different results and teachers learned when they need to use each one. The classroom building and proactive circle is used as the foundation and all other circles follow this model. A restorative strategies circle is a safer than usual space for discussion based on the use of the following key seven elements and roles: the keeper, the talking piece, values, consensus, ceremony, stages and storytelling. Although all four circles are used for different purposes, they all include the same seven elements: keeper, talking piece, values, consensus, ceremony, stages and storytelling. The keeper is to maintain the integrity of the circle expectations and “keeps” the circle process. The role is

different from the teacher role and is a participant in the circle. The talking piece encourages respect, practices listening and allows the opportunity to speak with option of pass. Values is based on the principles of respect for all, listening for understanding, speaking from the heart, honor the talking piece and confidentiality of the individuals in the circle. Consensus allows the idea that the circle is a community in which they seek agreement. Ceremony involves the invitation, principles, questions and closing. Stages are the four stages needed to complete the circle, getting acquainted, building relationship, addressing issues and taking action. Storytelling allows each participant to tell a story and feel that they have been heard. Teachers and administrators are taught the importance of each circle and how to implement them into their classrooms. A restorative meeting / conference training was held for 36 district AP's. Throughout this training participants learned what preparation needs to be completed before calling the conference, the script that has to be followed and the process of this conference.

Participant Feedback

Participants from four training sites were asked to complete a training feedback survey. A total of 106 participants completed the survey about their experience during the training and reported they can implement what they learned. The four training sites were located at Brentwood Elementary (site one), Bay Haven Elementary (site two), Garden Elementary (site three), and Glenallen Elementary (site four). Training sites one through three had 100% response rate while training site four had an 81% response rate. The tables below illustrate the twelve questions from the survey and the percentage of agree and strongly agree for each training site. The majority of participants strongly agreed that the facilitators were well-prepared and the facilitators were helpful. Overall the ratings were highly favorable for all questions at Brentwood, Bay Haven and Glenallen Elementary Schools. They reported that they were

informed of the workshop objectives; felt the workshop lived up to expectations; offered sufficient practice and opportunities for feedback; had appropriate content; and was of appropriate level of difficulty and paced correctly. However, Garden Elementary scored strongly agree less on several questions to include the content, difficulty, pace and relevance of the workshop.

Table 2
Percent Rating Agree/Strongly Agree by Training Location

1. I was well informed about the objectives of this workshop.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	9%	88%
Bay Haven	10%	90%
Garden	8%	88%
Glenallen	12%	88%

2. This workshop lived up to my expectations.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	6%	94%
Bay Haven	7%	93%
Garden	26%	70%
Glenallen	12%	88%

3. The content is relevant to my job.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	9%	91%
Bay Haven	3%	94%
Garden	15%	62%
Glenallen	12%	88%

4. The workshop lived up to my expectations.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	9%	91%
Bay Haven	10%	90%
Garden	34%	58%
Glenallen	6%	94%

5. The activities in this workshop gave me sufficient practice and feedback.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	3%	94%
Bay Haven	7%	90%
Garden	31%	65%
Glenallen	12%	88%

6. The difficulty level of this workshop was appropriate.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	15%	85%
Bay Haven	7%	93%
Garden	35%	61%
Glenallen	6%	94%

7. The pace of this workshop was appropriate.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	12%	88%
Bay Haven	10%	87%
Garden	42%	38%
Glenallen	6%	94%

8. The facilitators were well-prepared.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	6%	94%
Bay Haven	3%	97%
Garden	-	100%
Glenallen	6%	94%

9. The facilitators were helpful.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	3%	97%
Bay Haven	3%	97%
Garden	-	100%
Glenallen	6%	94%

10. I accomplished the objectives of this workshop.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	9%	91%
Bay Haven	3%	97%
Garden	15%	85%
Glenallen	6%	94%

11. I will be able to use what I learned in this workshop.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	12%	85%
Bay Haven	7%	93%
Garden	12%	76%
Glenallen	12%	88%

12. The workshop was a good way for me to learn this content.

Site	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brentwood	6%	94%
Bay Haven	7%	93%
Garden	19%	73%
Glenallen	6%	94%

Practicum

Each training participant was also required to complete a seven-hour practicum where they implemented circles in their own or another teacher's classroom for hands-on experience. Afterwards, they completed a Restorative Strategies Log which was collected.

Overall the vast majority of staff who conducted circles were teachers. 270 (89%) teachers, 13 (4.3%) administrators and 19 (7%) other staff reported conducting circles at 19 of the 23 non-charter elementary schools. Circles were conducted at all elementary grades.

Table 3
Number and Percent of Circle Facilitators by School

Participating Schools	Frequency	Percent
Alta Vista	1	0.3
Bay Haven	52	17.2
Brentwood	48	15.8
Cranberry	4	1.3
Fruitville	12	4
Garden	48	15.8
Glenallen	39	12.9
Gocio	9	3
Gulf Gate	5	1.7
Lakeview	18	5.9
Lamarque	2	0.7
Oak Park	6	2
Phillippi Shores	3	1
Southside	8	2.6
Tatum Ridge	6	2
Toledo Blade	26	8.6
Tuttle	2	0.7
Venice	4	1.3
Wilkinson	4	1.3
Missing	6	2
Total	303	100

The number of circles conducted across classrooms ranged from schools ranged from 2 to 16. Most facilitators reported conducting 6 or 7. The average length of circles ranged between 6 and 31 minutes. Table 4 reports the average number of circles and the average length of circles by school. Six facilitators did not indicate their school.

Table 4

Number and Percent of Circle Facilitators by School

	Average Number of Circles	Average Length of Circles
Alta Vista	6	10
Bay Haven	6	19
Brentwood	7	18
Cranberry	4	31
Fruitville	6	14
Garden	6	20
Glenallen	7	18
Gocio	8	14
Gulf Gate	7	21
Lakeview	7	20
Lamarque	8	23
Oak Park	7	22
Phillippi Shores	7	6
Southside	7	21
Tatum Ridge	6	21
Toledo Blade	7	18
Tuttle	7	25
Venice	6	15
Wilkinson	7	22
Total		

During Tier 1 Training, the participants were trained in the use of various types of circles. When they completed the Restorative Strategies Log training log, they were asked to report which type of circles they implemented. The types of circles listed most often included: academic, community building, proactive and responsive. Table 5 lists these types of circles with a brief definition.

Table 5
Types of Circles Implemented

Type of Circle	Definition
Community Building / Proactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and student engagement • Avoid problem behaviors • Builds community • Safe place for students discussion • Helps students develop empathy • Develops understanding of how challenging behaviors impact everyone
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase academic performance • Formative assessment – prior knowledge, comprehension checks • Depth of knowledge opportunities • Predications, expressing opinions, pre-planning for projects and writing • Everyone has an opportunity to participate
Responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair the harm (Punishment vs. Natural Consequences) • Address problem behavior (whole class or small group) • Use specific high- quality questions to explore challenging circumstances • Issues to use responsive circle for: bullying, stealing, behavior problems and poor social skills
Restorative Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jointly agree to appropriate alternative to or reduction of out-of-school suspension.

Post-Practicum Survey

After participating in the practicum and facilitating circles, training participants were asked several questions about their experiences conducting Proactive, Academic and Restorative Circles. The summarized results to these questions appear below.

Respondents indicated which type of circle they utilized in their classrooms. Table 6 depicts that they used the community – building / pro-active restorative circles most frequently. Ninety-three percent used this type of circle, followed by 74% who reported using whole – group responsive

circles and academic restorative circles. Forty- nine percent used small group responsive circles.

Table 6
Type of Circle Used in the Classroom

Type of Circle	Percent Indicating did use Circle	Percent Indicating did Not use Circle
Community – Building / Pro-Active Restorative Circles	93.0%	7.0%
Academic Restorative Circles	74.3%	25.7%
Whole – Group Responsive Circles	74.8%	25.2%
Small – Group Responsive Circles	49.6%	50.4%

Respondents were also asked how frequently they used specific circles. Sixty-six percent of respondents indicated that they use the community – building/pro-active restorative circles once a week, 22.6 reported using them once a month and 2.3% indicated they rarely used this circle. Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated that they use academic restorative circles once a week, 36.5% reported using them once a month and 3.9% rarely used this circle. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that they use the whole-group responsive circle for most issues, 51% used it for some issues and 34.3% used it for few issues. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that they use the small-group responsive circles for most issues, 62.7% used it for some issues and 22.4% used it for a few issues.

Training participants were asked if they agreed/disagreed with a number of statements about Community Building-Proactive Circles. There responses are summarized in Table 7. Over 94% of survey respondents agreed that their students were eager to participate in circles, were more

empathetic towards each other, demonstrated increased respect, had improved peer relationships and that there was a more positive classroom climate. There was less agreement about student disruptive behaviors and student’s ability to resolve their own issues. Over one third of the respondents disagreed that the use of Community Building Proactive Circles resulted in improved attendance.

Table 7
As a Result of Community Building -Proactive Circles:

	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My students seemed eager to participate in the circle.	86.2%	12.3%	1.5%	0.0%
Student attendance has improved.	15.0%	50.4%	16.3%	18.1%
Student learning engagement has improved.	47.4%	43.0%	8.8%	0.9%
I gain insight about my students that effectively informs my teaching.	85.4%	14.6%	0.0%	0.0%
My students exhibit fewer disruptive behaviors.	36.4%	51.9%	10.1%	1.6%
My students are able to resolve their own issues.	20.8%	64.6%	13.1%	1.5%
My students are more empathetic towards one another.	47.7%	49.2%	3.1%	0.0%
My students show an increased respect toward one another.	48.5%	46.2%	5.4%	0.0%
My students demonstrate improved peer relationships.	7.7%	47.7%	4.6%	0.0%
The climate of my classroom has changed for the better.	53.1%	43.0%	3.9%	0.0%

Training participants were asked if they agreed/disagreed with a number of statements about Academic Circles. Their responses are summarized in Table 8. Over 96% of survey respondents agreed that their students seemed more comfortable responding to questions about academic content, and were more engaged during instruction. Ninety-five percent of respondents wrote that they easily incorporated academic circles into their instruction.

Table 8
As a Result of Implementing Academic Circles:

	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My students seemed to me more comfortable responding to questions about academic content	60.2%	35.9%	3.9%	0.0%
My students seem more engaged during academic instruction	58.3%	38.8%	1.9%	1.0%
I am easily able to incorporate academic circles into my instruction.	56.3%	38.8%	3.9%	1.0%

Training participants were asked if they agreed/disagreed with a number of statements about Responsive Circles. Their responses are summarized in Table 9. Over 96% of survey respondents agreed that they gained insight about their students to inform instruction, understood the causes of their behavior and were able to actively include students in addressing problematic behaviors. Ninety-three percent of teachers believed they spent less time disciplining students. Eighty-nine percent indicated that they made fewer disciplinary referrals and 91% reported that their students made more positive behavioral choices.

Table 9
As a Result of Implementing Responsive Circles:

	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I gain insight about my students that effectively inform my teaching.	75.7%	22.5%	1.8%	0.0%
I better understand the causes of my students' behavior choices.	62.7%	33.6%	2.7%	0.9%
I am better able to actively include students in addressing problematic behaviors.	67.6%	30.6%	1.8%	0.0%
I spend less time disciplining students.	37.8%	55.0%	7.2%	0.0%

I make fewer disciplinary referrals.	47.3%	41.8%	8.2%	2.7%
My students make positive behavior choices.	45.5%	45.5%	9.1%	0.0%

Outcome Data

Restorative circles in schools have shown significant improvements in behavior and a feeling of a safer community for the students. Restorative practices helps students to choose the appropriate behavior and how to resolve issues before they lead into behavioral problems. By combining positive behavior support and restorative strategies students learn why positive behavior is important.