Piloting Restorative Justice in Middle School

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Background of Study
Importance of Restorative Justice

To address the high number of referrals and suspensions

Disproportionality

To build community
Purpose of Study

1) To deepen understanding of the dynamics of implementing equity policies and change in schools, and

2) to identify challenges and possible lessons for policymakers and school leaders for future efforts to design, implement and institutionalize change that benefits students.
Theoretical Framework: Restorative Justice

Philosophical approach to wrong-doing

Rooted in diverse cultures (Native American, Maori) and Religion (Judaism, Buddhism)

Respect as RJ’s core underlying value
Theoretical Framework

Restorative Justice Environment

Prevention of infractions

Emphasizes an ethos of care and social and emotional learning
Methods

Longitudinal Case study
Methods

Population and Sample: School and District Administrators
Methods

Data collection: Interviews, observations, focus groups
Methods

Data Analysis: Apriori and inductive coding
Findings

1) Vision and careful planning
Findings

2) Common definition of RJ practices by participants
Findings

3) Starting restorative circles with students in most need

Tier II of MTSS
Findings

4) RJ circles as community building practices that allow students equal voice
Findings

5) Divergent purposes, goals, and hopes

“The Ed Specialist was disappointed after an RJ circle because she did not get to teach skills to kids.”

“The AP wanted to see a drop in referrals.”
Findings

6) Barriers and challenges

“The principal and I do the chacha.”
Discussion

These practices provided space for the “frequent fliers” to be included in the community, to feel supported by peers and adults, and to have a say on what matters to them.
Conclusions

Despite success and observable changes in students, barriers and challenges continue in implementing these practices.
Conclusions

Healthy environments are paramount for student learning and developing a sense of belonging in the school.
Our research continues

We are in the third year of the study

Michael Bailey’s dissertation will focus on student perspectives