Leadership and School Change

Running a school is a complex task. Learning outcomes, safety, standardized test performance, teacher retention, building maintenance, budgets and strategic plans are only a few of the challenges a school administrator faces. Even with a strong staff, hardworking students and supportive parents, an administrator still has a very difficult job. So the idea of implementing a new program for dealing with unruly students, reaching out to disconnected parents and educating staff with varying degrees of openness to new ideas may seem overwhelming.

The field of restorative practices offers a framework for implementing schoolwide change while at the same time engaging all of the stakeholders. In this chapter we will focus mostly on the idea of change guided by a building administrator, but we recognize that anyone in a school — staff, parent or student — could be an agent of change. A teacher, without necessarily having administrative support or explicit approval, can implement many of the ideas presented in the first two chapters of this book and find great success in transforming his or her classroom. The ideas could even begin

to spread to other teachers. However, because a building principal is the only one who has overall authority, meaningful schoolwide change will not occur without his or her support and commitment.

David Gleicher's "Formula for Change" (attributed to Gleicher in Beckhard & Harris, 1987) is a helpful way of looking at the possibility of achieving intentional change in a school:

Dissatisfaction + Vision + Practical Approach > Resistance

According to this formula, intentional change is possible when:

> A perceived need for change (often expressed as dissatisfaction with how things are now) and

> A compelling vision of what is possible and

> A practical approach to bringing about those changes (seen as concrete steps that can be taken toward the vision)

> Are collectively greater than the resistance to change.

Perceiving the Need for Change

The schools that approach the IIRP to learn about restorative practices share a common recognition that there is something about their schools they want to change. They may or may not have the words to describe exactly what they're looking for, but the crux of the issue is generally a shared feeling that the sense of community in their school needs to improve.

School administrators vary in how they describe why they are considering the implementation of restorative practices. Many have a desire to simply improve school culture — to have better relationships between students and staff, among students themselves and between the staff and students' families. Others identify the need for better behavior among their students or for better decorum in classes.

Regardless of how the administrators or staff of a school describe the reason for change, the school as a whole must perceive a need for change. A school need not be facing a crisis to want positive change. For example, one administrator who contacted the IIRP for training said: "We don't have significant discipline problems here. But student interest in extracurricular activities

is dropping off, there seems to be a lot of apathy, and we'd like to bring back a sense of school spirit." So the only requirement to get the ball rolling is that people have a desire to make things better.

The Vision of Restorative Practices

Restorative practices is not a one-size-fits-all-schools system for change. Each school must develop a unique vision of what they want to achieve. We urge schools to employ quantitative measures to study the results of restorative practices. Most schools report dramatic reductions in disciplinary incidents. Some schools trained by the IIRP, for example, have reduced office referrals by half in a single year. Other common measures include reductions in administrative detentions, suspensions and expulsions. Incidents of classroom disruption often decline sharply, as well as fighting, smoking, tardiness and absenteeism. (See iirp.edu/school-resources for the latest research, articles and other useful materials.)

Qualitative outcomes, though more difficult to measure and report, can be even more dramatic. Although to date reporting of qualitative improvement has been largely anecdotal, teachers in schools that have achieved a restorative culture report more positive collaboration between students and teachers and among the teachers themselves. A sense of teamwork develops and people are more inclined to resolve problems through cooperation. Administrators report that their relationships with teachers improve and become more collaborative, rather than strictly supervisory.

Students have also reported that they sense a different school climate in a restorative school than in other schools. For example, a transfer student from a traditional school to a restorative practices school said, "One thing I noticed right way was the friendly atmosphere." Another girl switched from a restorative school to a traditional school. Her mother said to the new principal, "You have a nice school here, but something's missing." She moved her daughter back to the first school. Some time later, the principal of the traditional school investigated what that "something missing" was and

eventually adopted restorative practices in her own school.

Familiarity with other schools' success is a way for some schools to set goals for the use of restorative practices. Yet each school must articulate its own unique vision of what it would like to achieve.

Organizational Change: A Practical Approach

Once a school recognizes a need for change and articulates a vision for the future, the next step is to set a course for implementation of the desired changes. Of course, sustained change will not happen overnight. It requires an incremental process that is suited to the school.

When the IIRP is invited to a school to discuss restorative practices, we almost always meet first with the school principal, guidance counselors and anyone else responsible for maintaining the sense of culture in the school building. We talk very briefly about restorative practices, but then we ask what the school's needs are.

Often the leadership of the school perceives a crisis, but not always. The principal may say that too many kids are being sent to the office or there are too many disruptions in the classroom. Whatever the school's needs, we always emphasize that while we may be the experts in restorative practices, the administration and staff of that school are the experts in their own building. As trainers and consultants, we can encourage and instill hope. We can provide tools, techniques and new perspectives. Ultimately, however, the school can and must solve its own problems.

Such a participatory approach is a way of modeling the essence of the restorative ethos that we advocate, but it is also the plain truth. While teachers and staff can be trained in restorative practices, they have to go and try out what they've learned. More consultations and more trainings are useless without their commitment to take risks and practice what they have learned.

Implementation starts with school or district leaders, followed by engagement with the entire school community. A leadership

team should be formed that includes administrators as well as a cross-section of teachers, counselors and others. This team needs to gain a good understanding of what restorative practices involves so they can help articulate a vision and develop a concrete implementation plan. These steps establish the readiness of a school or district to introduce significant change. Once training begins, schools need to provide time for professional learning groups, composed of administrators and staff, to share successes and challenges with one another and further their own knowledge. Ongoing coaching supports these efforts to embed restorative practices in the school culture and sustain change.
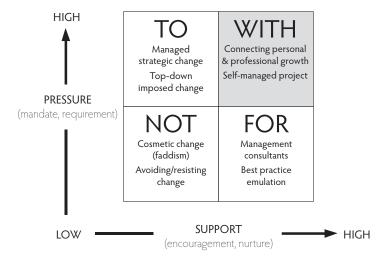

Figure 8. Organizational Change Window.

Organizational Change Window

The "Organizational Change Window" (see Figure 8) defines the restorative path to change by mirroring the Social Discipline Window. Instead of control and support, the two axes that underpin the Social Discipline Window, the two axes of the Organizational

Change Window are pressure and support.

Change TO people. Pressure without support breeds resentment and resistance. Imposing change from above may seem to be the quickest way to institute change, but without support for the staff and without participatory engagement, change is superficial and fleeting. The top-down method has traditionally been the approach to change in many organizational structures, but we argue that it fails to achieve change that is effective, meaningful and enduring. Like punishment, changes imposed by pressure alone work only when those in authority are watching, but they are not internalized by the organization's staff.

Change FOR people. Support without pressure wastes resources. Providing tools and strategies without ensuring their use rarely brings change. Most people are inherently resistant to change, particularly if they don't perceive a genuine commitment to that change on the part of the administration. Without pressure to back up initiatives, people will ignore new ideas and avoid making changes. It is the rare person who wakes up in the morning and says, "I think I'd like to have some personal growth today." Growth, both personal and professional, needs the leadership's firm commitment as a motivating force to overcome inertia.

NOT doing change. When neither pressure nor support are present, the best that can be hoped for is the false illusion of change. Many bureaucracies demonstrate this pattern. Initiatives are introduced with no support or mandate so the change is merely cosmetic. The proposed change is perceived by everyone in the organization as peripheral to the primary role of the organization and therefore is largely ignored. Staff, who have seen this phenomenon repeated again and again, simply wait for the latest initiative to pass and joke about when the next one will arrive.

Change WITH people. The most effective way to bring about change in a school — or any organization — is to combine high levels of both pressure and support and engage staff in a participatory process. Real change will occur only when teachers and staff recognize that they will be held accountable for change and simultaneously are given the support and tools they need.

Fair Process

Fairness is an essential ingredient of a successful change process. An excellent article on organizational management that appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* suggested that there are three key components to people's perception that a process was fair: engagement, explanation and expectation clarity (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003).

Fair process simply means that people are treated in a respectful way:

› "Engagement" means that everyone affected by a decision is given the chance to provide input and have an opportunity to discuss various possible courses of action.
› "Explanation" means that after a leader has made a decision, that decision and the process and reasoning behind the decision are made clear to all stakeholders.
› "Expectation clarity" means that everyone involved understands the implications of that decision, the specific expectations and the consequences for failing to meet those expectations.

Fair process does not mean democracy. We are not advocating that a school make decisions by putting them to a vote or by trying to meet every individual's needs. Fair process is about creating open channels of communication and about giving people reason to believe that their ideas and feelings truly have been taken into account. People do understand that a school administration is ultimately responsible for making the decisions it deems fit. But when people feel they have been treated fairly, they are more likely to

cooperate willingly with the decisions that are made — even when the outcomes are different from the ones they may have preferred or desired.

When CSF Buxmont schools first introduced the use of restorative conferencing, Ted Wachtel, the founder and executive director at that time, relied on the use of fair process to get the staff's support in accomplishing this organizational change. He told the staff that he had invited several Australians to train them, but that he was not sure how conferencing could best be implemented in the CSF Buxmont schools. He asked for their support and especially their input. He hoped that, after the training, some of them would try the process with their students when behavior problems arose. After the trainings, staff freely voiced their opinions, including some who were skeptical. But others went ahead and used the conferencing process. Wachtel decided, based on subsequent discussions with staff, that conferencing would be used in the future for the most significant incidents, including those that might have otherwise resulted in expulsion from school.

Using fair process, he had engaged staff by seeking their help in trial conferences and by soliciting their opinions. He then explained his decision to implement conferencing in terms of reducing discharges and improving the reintegration of students back into the school community after their disruptive behavior had adversely affected everyone. He also made his expectations clear for the future: that each of the CSF schools should have a few individuals gain experience to serve as conference facilitators so that they would be available whenever incidents appropriate for conferencing arose.

Restorative conferencing was smoothly implemented into all of the CSF Buxmont schools. Fair process facilitated a change that otherwise might have been adversarial. People felt acknowledged, that their opinions were valued and that, even if their views differed with the decision of the leadership, they supported the decision because they felt that they were treated fairly.