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# Sustainability of Whole School Change Through Restorative Practices: An Independent Action-Research Study



# Defining Sustainability

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- “School context is dynamic- changing significantly and unpredictably across and within school years” (McIntosh, et al., 2013).
- Implementing systems-level school-based practices with fidelity is a daunting task that requires varying levels of ongoing resources.
- Programs can only reach a level of **sustainability when fidelity of practice can be maintained throughout, or in spite of inevitable changes, and positive outcomes are actualized in the long term with decreased dependence on outside resources to insure fidelity of implementation** (McIntosh, et al. 2013).



# Background & Rationale

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- 2011- analysis of their School Improvement Survey data revealed a need to improve overall school climate at its high schools, and address the increasing trends in disciplinary infractions and punitive sanctions.
- IIRP's whole school change through Restorative Practices program was piloted in response to these needs.
- Since the onset of RP implementation, Freedom's longitudinal data of discipline referrals over the initial three years of implementation clearly indicates a notable decline in total number of Level 1, 2, and 3 infractions and disciplinary actions.



# Background and Rationale

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- ◆ “Restorative Practices” (RP) identified as one of ten interconnecting frameworks that support all educational and professional processes expected to advance the district’s charge to assure high-quality education and improved achievement for all students in BADS’s “Roadmap to Educational Excellence 2.0”.
- ◆ Initial positive trends in discipline data, and its integration into the districts school improvement plan gives credence to the importance of sustaining these practices.
- ◆ In close examination of Freedom’s mid-year data from Sept 2010/2011-December 2014/2015, revealed findings that gave rise for concern.



# Background and Rationale

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- While total number of disciplinary referrals was still significantly lower than that of pre-RP implementation, totals nearly doubled in 6 out of the 7 infraction categories in the 2014-2015 school year, when compared to that of 2013-2014.
- Overall decrease in referrals across all ethnicities was evident, but Latinos and African Americans were still disproportionately overrepresented in school discipline.
- Recent study led by Ann Gregory of Rutgers University resulted in findings that had implications “for the potential of RP in terms of reducing the racial discipline gap” (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2015).
- Results in this study found “higher RP implementation was associated with lower use of disruption/defiance disciplinary referrals with Latino and African American students (Gregory, et.al., 2015)



# Background and Rationale

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- Many possible factors contributing to negative trends in discipline data- waning RP's implementation may be one of them.
- RP's place in BASD's roadmap 2.0, it's potential to decrease racial disparity in discipline, and the recent rise in disciplinary referrals/ sanctions gives credence to the value of investing time and attention into further investigation of Freedom's fidelity of RP implementation.
- Therefore, purpose of this action research study was to conduct an investigation to shed light on Freedom's level of fidelity with which RP is being implemented and the factors that either support or impede implementation.
- Based on findings, it was expected that the probability for sustainability of whole-school change through Restorative Practices might also be predicted.



# What current research tell us about Sustainability of Restorative Practices

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- Research on factors specifically affecting sustainability RP is scarce.
- Research-based literature on the factors related to sustainability of other school-based practices is more significant [i.e. SWPBS and Four R programs- Bambara, et al. 2009; Crooks, C., Chiodo, D., Zwarych, S., Hughes, R., & Wolfe, D.(2013; McIntosh, et al., (2011; McIntosh, Mercer, Hume, Frank, Turri, & Mathews, (2013); McIntosh, Predy, Upreti, Hume, Turri, & Mathews, (2014)]

McIntosh, et al., (2013) propose

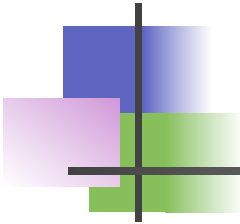
Four Hypothesized ***Broad-based*** Factors Affecting Sustainability of School-based Practices (McIntosh, et al., (2013)

**PRIORITY**

**EFFECTIVENESS**

**EFFICIENCY**

**CONTINUOUS REGENERATION**



# Hypothesized Factors and Key Interrelated Variables Inherent in Each

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## **PRIORITY**

general, intangible support for practice amidst the sea of competing initiatives

acts on sustainability by increasing likelihood personnel will engage in implementation activities instead of competing tasks

## **Key Variables**

Staff Commitment (buy-in); Administrative Support; Ongoing Resources; Integration Into Existing and New Efforts

*"If activities and principles of a practice can be braided into existing initiatives that are valued, have high priority for implementation, and have been shown to produce valued outcomes, it may be more likely to sustain" (Adelman & Taylor, 2003)*





## Hypothesized Factors and Variables (cont.)

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### **EFFECTIVENESS**

The extent to which the practice results in valued outcomes

Fidelity of practice leads to positive outcomes → Positive outcomes lead to → Increased fidelity as efforts are positively reinforced by improved student behavior and other positive outcomes.

#### **Key Variables**

Perceived Effectiveness; Implementer Skill and Knowledge; Teaming

### **EFFICIENCY**

Straightforward factor that includes consideration of resources needed to implement practice. The more practice is perceived as part of daily routine, the less reliance on external resources.



## Hypothesized Factors & Variables (cont.)

### **CONTINUOUS REGENERATION**

Ongoing data-driven adaptation of the practice to improve contextual fit within a changing context (McIntosh, Horner, et al., 2009).

#### **Key Variables**

#### **Collection and Use of Data; Capacity Building**

Across studies,

#### **FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION**

found to be

***the critical component of sustainability***

and the

**Interrelated factors/variables affecting fidelity**

that **consistently** emerge at varying levels of statistical significance include:



## Research-based variable factors affecting fidelity

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- ◆ Administrative support on the district and building level
- ◆ Effective teaming
- ◆ Use of data-based decision making
- ◆ The extent to which SWPBS is understood and accepted as typical practice and integrated into other school initiatives
- ◆ Ongoing professional development
- ◆ Stakeholder involvement (includes administration, staff, students, parents, and community)



# **Generalizing Research-Based Literature on Sustainability of SWPBS, Via Action Research on RP Implementation at Freedom High School.**

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This action research study addressed the need for further investigation into probability for sustainability through an in depth examination into Restorative Practices implementation of five teachers and one administrator to answer the following questions:

- Is Restorative Practices implementation evident at Freedom High School, and to what degree of fidelity?
- What are the perceived outcomes resulting from Freedom's RP implementation?
- What are the perceived factors supporting RP Implementation?
- What are the perceived factors impeding RP Implementation?
- Based on Freedom's current implementation practices, what is the relative probability for long-term sustainability?

# Method

## Participants- Convenience Selection Utilized

**Participant Demographics** (\*) "Targeted" Staff Members -those who are selected/  
trained/expected to facilitate Restorative Conferences based on training, experience, leadership role they play.

Particip. Code	Gender	Years Exp.	Job Title	Subject Area	Avg # Students per class	Description of Training in Restorative Practices
P1-re15	F	15	Teacher	English- Drama & Public Speaking	18-35	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, "classroom experience"
P2-se30	M	30	Teacher	Special Ed.- Work Training	5-10	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, Master's of Science Degree in RP (June 2015)
P3-re9	F	9	Teacher	World Language Heritage & Spanish I & II	18-36	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, "working hands-on with kids- you see what works & what doesn't."
P4-ad23 (*)	M	23	Administrator	Discipline- Gd. 9-12	NA	4-day professional development event at IIRP headquarters prior to start of year 2 of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, & Family Engagement & Empowerment
P5-se10 (*)	F	10	Teacher	Special Ed- Emotional Support	NA	Master's of Science degree (30 graduate credits) in Restorative Practices: 2009, Leadership Training, Training of Trainers
P6-se34 (*)	F	34	Teacher Dept. Chair	Special Ed Remedial Reading	12-15	District Professional Development during first two years of school-wide implementation: Basic Restorative Practices, Using Circles Effectively, Facilitating Restorative Justice Conferences, Graduate Student in IIRP's Master's degree program: completed 21/30 credits, Leadership Training, Training of Trainers



# Research Procedures and Measures

## Data Collection- mixed method

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### Quantitative Data: IIRP Staff Self-Assessment Survey

- ◆ Required reflection on their practice and evaluation of level of proficiency/fidelity with which each execute the 11 essential elements necessary for successful whole-school implementation of restorative practices
- ◆ Each categorized based on “who needs to understand and use each element to change the culture of the school” (IIRP, 2011).

School-wide (**SW**) - to be utilized **by all staff**

- ◆ **Affective Statements**
- ◆ **Restorative Questions**
- ◆ **Small Impromptu Conferences**
- ◆ **Fair Process**
- ◆ **Reintegrative Management of Shame**
- ◆ **A Restorative Staff Community**
- ◆ **Fundamental Hypothesis Understanding**

Qualitative Data: One on one 30-45 minute interviews



# Research Procedures and Measures

Data Collection- **mixed method** (cont)

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Broad-based (**BB**) - **instructional and administrative staff members**

- ◆ **Proactive Circles**
- ◆ **Responsive Circles**
- ◆ **A Restorative Approach with Families**

Targeted (**T**)- to be facilitated **only by members of a multidisciplinary team selected, trained, and proficient at carrying out that specific element.**

- ◆ **Restorative Conferences**



## Research Procedures and Measures

### Data Collection- mixed method (cont)

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#### **Qualitative Data:** One-to-one 30-45 minute interviews

- ◆ Held in a private office or classroom
- ◆ Minimal risk for interruptions caused by background noise and/or daily traffic in order to minimize factors that might hinder the interview &/or digital voice recording process
- ◆ Each digital file of interviews assigned an exclusive numerical code for storing and organizing of data.





# Research Procedures and Measures

## Quantitative Data Collection & Analysis

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- ◆ Each survey element broken down into specific characteristics qualifying level of implementation- rating scale of 1 through 5.
- ◆ All participants responses to survey characteristic items were organized in tables per element.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

- ◆ Mean scores were calculated per participant (PMS) and as a group (GMS). System of organizing of data was enhanced by by color coding ratings- which increased efficiency of analysis.
  - 1= not at all (low- grey)    2=rarely(low- grey)
  - 3=sometimes (moderate- **yellow**)
  - 4=often(high- **green**)    5=always(high-**green**)

# Research Procedures and Measures

Example of how survey data was organized and enhanced with color coding to increase efficiency of data analysis

Element Characteristics	Pn	Pn	Pn	Pn	Pn	Pn	GM
I consistently follow the script.	3	4	5	1	5	1*	
I keep my personal views and needs separate from the conferencing process.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
I acknowledge and disapprove of harmful behavior.	3	4	5	1	5	1*	
I value all participants who are involved.	3	5	4	1	5	1*	
I allow for free expression of emotions.	3	5	5	1	5	1*	
I ensure that the conference stays focused on the incident.	3	4	5	1	5	1*	
I allow participants to develop their own solutions to the harm resulting from the incident.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
I encourage clear agreements.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
I encourage others to separate the deed from the doer in the conference process.	3	4	4	1	5	1*	
In the conference I facilitated, the wrongdoer was reintegrated into the community.	4	4	4	1	5	1*	
<b>Participants' Individual and Group Mean (GM) Scores for Element 6</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1*</b>	<b>3.1</b>



# Research Procedures and Measures

## Qualitative Data Analysis

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- ◆ Excerpts from interview transcripts first highlighted in yellow when evidence was found therein to participants' understanding of and/or practical application of the 11 Essential Elements.
- ◆ During several subsequent reviews, excerpts that provided evidence of observed occurrences of RP implementation by other staff members were also highlighted.
- ◆ Extrapolation of data enhanced by alphanumeric coding based upon the specific element for which it evidenced. When the connection between excerpt and element was not clearly evident, further clarification was given by adding additional coding and parenthetical notes identifying the specific element characteristic evidenced
- ◆ Parenthetical notes added to identify excerpts specifically related to research questions 3 & 4.



# Research Procedures and Measures

## Data Analysis of Interview Transcriptions (cont.)

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- ◆ Number of coded responses totaled per element.
- ◆ Highest number of occurrences was 20, lowest was 5.
- ◆ Maximum number of occurrences divided by 3 to calculate a “low”, “medium”, and “high” range of performance that could be compared to the group mean scores and corresponding level of performances derived using the survey data.
- ◆ 0-6 occurrences = “low” fidelity, 7-13 = “moderate”, & 14-20 = “high”.
- ◆ Total number of coded responses derived from qualitative analysis and GMS scores derived from qualitative analysis for all eleven essential elements were combined and averaged to derive Freedom’s overall level of RP implementation fidelity.

Table that summarizes combined levels of fidelity derived from quantitative and qualitative analysis.

11 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS	# of Coded Responses	Level of Fidelity	GMS	Level of Fidelity	Combined Fidelity
Proactive Circles	20	high	4.0	high	<b>HIGH</b>
Small Impromptu Conferences	16	high	4.0	high	<b>HIGH</b>
Restorative Questions	14	high	4.2	high	<b>HIGH</b>
Responsive Circles	14	high	4.2	high	<b>HIGH</b>
Affective Statements	12	moderate	4.1	high	<b>HIGH</b>
Fundamental Hypothesis Understanding	11	moderate	4.2	high	<b>HIGH</b>
Fair Process	7	moderate	4.1	high	<b>MODERATE</b>
A Restorative Approach with Families	7	moderate	3.4	moderate	<b>MODERATE</b>
Reintegrative Management of Shame	7	moderate	3.7	moderate	<b>MODERATE</b>
A Restorative Staff Community	7	moderate	2.9	low	<b>LOW</b>
Restorative Conferences	5	low	3.1	moderate	<b>LOW</b>
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>



# Results

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## **Is Restorative Practices implementation evident at Freedom High School, and to what degree of fidelity?**

Yes, and to a moderate degree of fidelity, but this result must be interpreted with caution due to discrepancies in data and study limitations inherent in the study sample.

## **What are the perceived outcomes resulting from Freedom's RP implementation?**

(\*\*) Denotes three dominant themes relative to perceived outcomes

(\*) Denotes outcomes identified by at least 50% of participants

Perceived Outcomes of RP Implementation	
Decrease in Discipline Referrals **	6
Overall Positive School Climate**	5
Increased Student Engagement**	5
Reparation of Rift in parent-school relationships*	3
Improved listening &/or general communication skills*	1



# Results (cont.)

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## What are the perceived factors supporting RP Implementation?

(\*\*) Denotes most dominant factor

(\*) Denotes factors identified by at least 50% of participants

Perceived Factors That Support RP Implementation	# out of 6 Participants who Identified Supporting Factor
<b>Administrative Support **</b>	6
<b>Team Collaboration and Support *</b>	4
<b>Access to faculty members who are strong “restorative role-models” *</b>	3
<b>Curriculum and class size &amp; structure compatible to RP *</b>	3
<b>A sense that RP is a natural fit, so easily integrated into daily practice *</b>	3
Access to data to track progress	1



# Results (cont.)

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## What are the perceived factors impeding RP Implementation?

(\*\*) Denotes most frequently noted barrier

(\*) Denotes barriers noted by at least 50% of participants.

Perceived Barriers That Impede RP Implementation	# out of 6 Participants Who Identified Barrier
<b>Lack of Adequate Professional Development **</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Lack of Time *</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Imbedded Beliefs and Attitudes Contrary to Tenets of RP *</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Curriculum and class size &amp; structure incompatible to RP *</b>	<b>3</b>
Lack of parent and community engagement	2
Lack of adequate data analysis	1





## Results (cont.)

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**Based on Freedom's current implementation practices, what is the relative probability for long-term sustainability?**

- ◆ Juxtaposition of this study's results with those of current research reveals that relative probability for long term sustainability of RP at Freedom High School is low.

## Juxtaposition of findings in this study with what current literature evidences about variable factors affecting sustainability of school-based practices (ie. SWPBS)

Research-based Factors Supporting Sustainability of SWPBS	Supporting Factors Existing at FHS	Barriers/Impeding Factors Existing at FHS
<b>Fidelity of implementation</b>		<b>Moderate fidelity</b>
<b>Administrative support (1)</b>	<b>Administrative Support (1) P= 6</b> <b>Access to faculty members who are strong “restorative role-models”(1) P= 3</b>	<b>Imbedded Beliefs and Attitudes Contrary to Tenets of RP (1) P= 3</b>
<b>Effective teaming (2)</b>	<b>Team Collaboration and Support (1, 2) P= 4</b>	<b>Imbedded Beliefs and Attitudes Contrary to Tenets of RP (1) P= 3</b>
<b>Use of data-based decision making (4)</b>	<b>Access to data to track progress (4) P= 1</b>	<b>Lack of adequate data analysis (4) P= 1</b>
<b>Extent to which SWPBS is understood and accepted as typical practice and integrated into other school initiatives (1,3)</b>	<b>Curriculum and class size &amp; structure compatible to RP (1) P= 3</b> <b>A sense that RP is a natural fit-easily integrated into daily practice (1, 3) P=3</b>	<b>Lack of Time (1, 3) P= 4</b> <b>Curriculum and class size &amp; structure incompatible to RP (1, 3) P= 3</b>
<b>On-going professional development (4)</b>		<b>Lack of effective professional development (4) P= 6</b>
<b>Stakeholder involvement (2)</b>		<b>Lack of parent and community engagement (2) P= 2</b>

### **(n) = 4 hypothesized factors proposed in McIntosh’s model of sustainability of school-based practices & interrelated feature**

- (1) **Priority**; acts on sustainability by increasing likelihood that school personnel will engage in implementation activities instead of competing tasks. Key variables include: staff commitment (buy-in and support), administrative support, integration into existing and new efforts, ongoing resources.
  - (2) **Effectiveness**; fidelity increases when implementation efforts are positively reinforced by improved outcomes (i.e. student behavior). Key variables include: perceived effectiveness, implementer skill and knowledge, teaming
  - (3) **Efficiency**; regards the effect to which practice can be easily integrated into teachers’ existing jobs, given many competing demands. Practice perceived as part of daily routine becomes less reliant on external resources & implementation costs may decrease.
  - (4) **Continuous Regeneration**; ongoing data-driven adaptation of the practice to improve contextual fit within changing context & capacity building
- (P = # or participant responses)



# Limitations

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## Inherent in the study sample:

- Subject areas of all teacher participants- highly compatible to RP- perspective from the population of teachers for which this was not the case grossly underrepresented.
- Level of training- 3/ 6 participants, including primary investigator, completed multiple graduate level classes as part of the master's degree program in Restorative Practices- increasing chance for participant bias and overrepresentation of high fidelity implementation in response to research questions.
- 6 participants named along with 6 other faculty members by the principal as those from a total of 114 faculty members (11%) to be observed, or perceived, to be implementing RP with "some degree" of fidelity. Data collection from the other 89% of the faculty might reveal significantly different results, thereby implicating investigation on much larger and diverse sample.



# Limitations (cont.)

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Inherent in the measure used for quantitative data

- ◆ Subjective personal bias on survey items may overinflate participant ratings.
- ◆ Not including student survey data decreased chance of detecting mismatches in perceptions – omitted due to systemic restraints



# Implications

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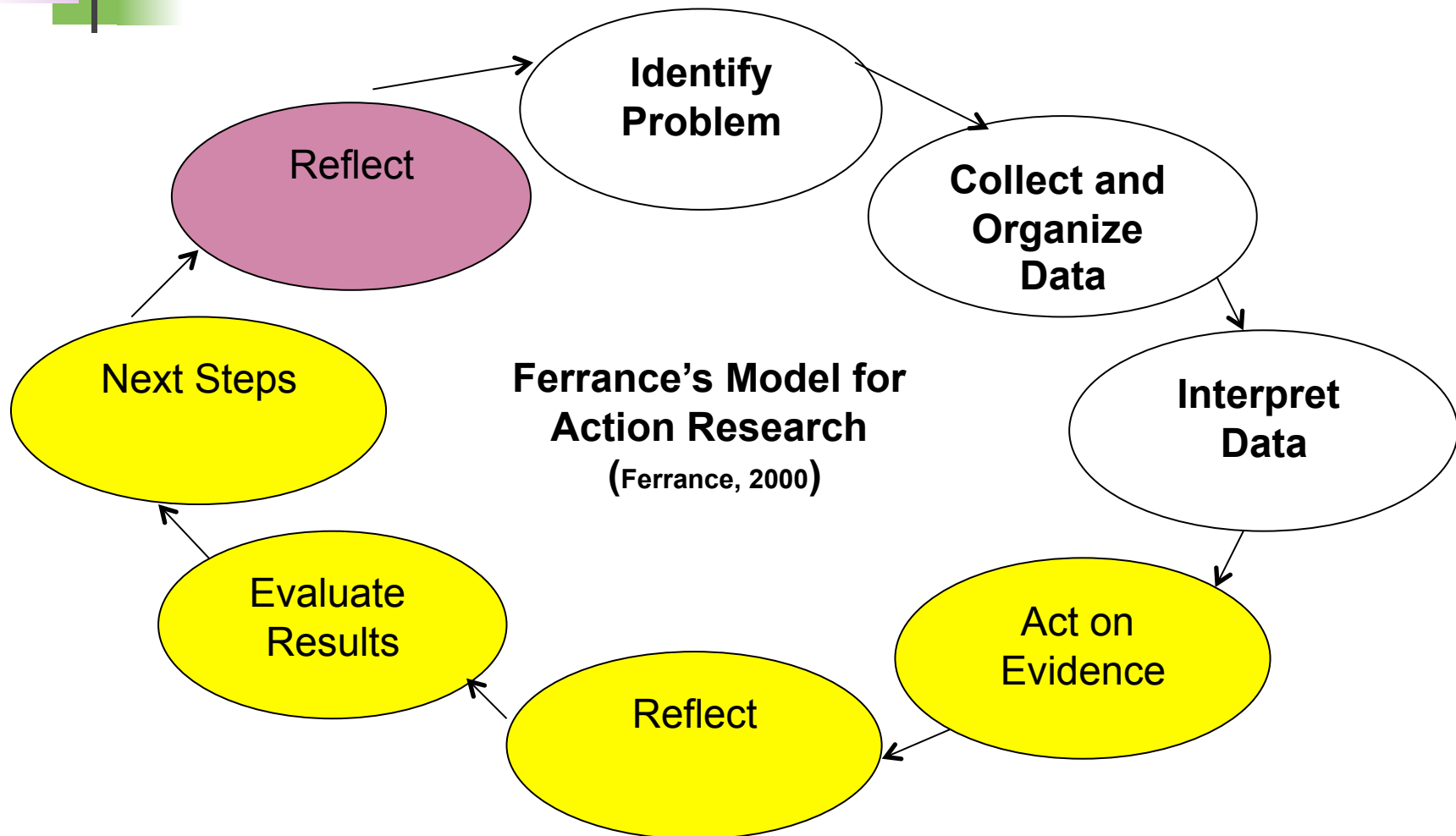
## **In light of study limitations,**

The “Moderate” score derived via data analysis is likely to be an inflation of the *actual* level of fidelity.

If so, than *fidelity* is actually “low” - *not being maintained* throughout, or in spite of inevitable changes that occur in within the context of the school environment, so the perceived *outcomes* evidenced in this study *will* more than likely *diminish* “*in the long term.*” Therefore,

**probability for sustainability is low.**

# Implications (cont.)





## Implications (cont.)

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- ◆ Barriers (deficits) exist that threaten sustainability of RP implementation at Freedom High, but significant supports (assets) also exist
- ◆ Some barriers are “*omnipresent and will always exist in school....but having access to a committed administrator and skilled school team willing to take concrete and strategic steps to overcome barriers was consistently perceived as more important to sustainability than the lack of adequate resources or opposition to SWPBS were to impeding it*” (McIntosh, et al., (2014))
- ◆ Freedom possesses the very assets McIntosh proposes can outweigh the deficits, if invested purposefully.
- ◆ Therefore, administration must move to reflecting on and evaluating the results of this study, and subsequently plan their “next steps” on the path towards increased fidelity of RP implementation.



# Recommendations

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Action Steps need to include:

- ◆ Summer presentation of this study's results to administration ✓
- ◆ School-wide data collection in order to gain deeper and more accurate insight into staff and student perceptions relative to RP implementation including fidelity of practice, perceived outcomes, and the factors perceived to be either supporting or impeding implementation ✓
- ◆ Increased opportunity for ongoing professional development in RP. ✓
- ◆ More effective utilization of PLGs for teaming and data-based decision-making relative to adaptation of daily practice as needed to improve student outcomes. ✓





## Recommendations (cont.)

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- Increased student and parent knowledge of RP and heightened awareness of overall impact on the school since initial implementation ✓

(Article in school paper, Presentation on RP to PTO, development of RP informational link on School webpage)

- Increased opportunities for students and parents to be more actively engaged in activities promoting RP and/or empowering them to implement within the context of school, community, and at home. ✓

(Freedom Friends- steering committee)