REPORT TO THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AT CLAREMONT ACADEMY

Claremont Academy has instituted Restorative Justice Practices as one component of a broader approach to cultivating and sustaining a strong, collaborative, and enriching student and faculty culture. We take as a given that students and teachers will perform better in an environment where people are valued, connected, and heard. Restorative Justice Practices are a key and central strategy in this endeavor:

1. The Ubuntu Culture: In 2012, the Claremont Community adopted the African Philosophy of Ubuntu as a driving force in the creation of our school climate. Basically stated, Ubuntu recognizes that a community is made up of all the individuals within it, and in order for one person to be successful and supported, all must feel a connection to one another. As a community "I am only because we are." Since 2012 we have worked to imbibe this sentiment within our students and teachers to ensure a culture of caring and success.
2. Mindfulness: Parallel to the culture piece, Claremont is committed to educating students and staff to the power of mindfulness activities. Being able to find moments throughout the day where members of the community can self-center and regulate the stresses of the day is an essential skill that will serve students throughout their lives. Some teachers build in mindfulness activities at the beginning, middle, or end of their classes and students are taught the fundamental skills of self-regulation.
3. Advisory: Each student is assigned to a grade 7-12 advisory group that meets once-a-week with a committed adult within the community. This 25 minute session can be focused on goal setting, mindfulness, grades, college-readiness, physical activity, and a number of other initiatives throughout the year. The main goal is to give every student at least one adult in the school community as a support for their education while at Claremont.
4. Mentorship: Claremont is lucky to have embedded mentorship opportunities. As part of the structure of advisory, our juniors and seniors interact with middle school students. We also have planned events where upperclassmen work with and advise small groups of middle school students. All of this is aimed at helping challenged, middle school students get advice to improve their choices.
5. Peer Mediation: Working with the Center For Non-Violent Solutions, Claremont has trained an advisor and a series of sophomore, junior, and senior students to function as Peer Mediators to help students solve conflicts that are inevitable in the day-to-day operations of a school.
6. Restorative Justice: Finally, Claremont has a team of 10 teachers who received training in Restorative Justice Practices. Two years ago, the entire faculty received training to utilize "Circle Forward" a process to engender conversation with students in peer-to-peer groups. Some teachers use this regularly in advisory. Others use it in classes.

   The team of 10 teachers received training to use Restorative Practices to address disruptive and inappropriate behaviors in the school. These offenses ranged from classroom disturbances (talking, insubordination, cell phone policy violation) to more serious events like assaults, bullying, peer-to-peer conflict, and destruction or theft of property. We also used the conference style approach to help diffuse teacher to student conflict. In fact, this was the largest percentage of Restorative activity at Claremont where students and teachers were failing to understand one another and not appreciating the position of the other.

   RJ provides a flexible system in which conferences can be very technical and ornate; where conferences are run by facilitators with scripts to ensure that all parties are heard. These conferences usually require both a pre-conference and post conference briefing. We have used these conferences occasionally but have found that we need them less since we are addressing the

smaller offenses earlier. Instead, we have used modified conferences with facilitators between teachers and students, students and students, and even between staff members. These informal conferences focus deeply on understanding and naming "the harm," understanding where the harm comes from, and being able to "make it right" with the person who was harmed. These conversations are time consuming, especially when measured against the more traditional, consequential outcomes of school discipline. Yet, with time, the need for them diminishes and teachers develop stronger capabilities of addressing student behavior in a more productive manner.

Ideally, all school discipline and consequences are aimed at behavioral change. The goal is to get students to develop as people, to understand their role in the community, and to stop breaking the community rules. Too often the traditional approach hands out a consequence but rarely creates the behavioral change it is meant to establish. In fact, in some cases, the consequence is so far removed from the behavior that the student no longer remembers what he/she did wrong. It has taken some time to help teachers get beyond the "consequence" as a "pound of flesh" approach for "harming" me to a more nuanced understanding of how we get people to make significant modifications in their actions. We have found, actually, that some students would much rather received a draconian consequence (detention, suspension, etc.) than have to speak to the person they harmed and make it right. As a result, we think this is more likely to encourage behavioral change.

Claremont does use traditional discipline tactics. Students do receive detentions; we do place students into "in-school" suspension, and we do suspend students from school. The last of which is usually reserved for serious violations of the Discipline Code (mostly 37 H violations) or for students who, after many attempts to right their behavior through "restorative" means, continue to violate the basic tenets of our community norms.

Through this we have vastly reduced our overall suspension incidents. At the end of March, Claremont had only 25 "suspendable" incidents. That was down from 34 in the previous year. These numbers represent huge decreases since 2012 when "suspendable" incidents were well over 200 a year.

It is important to reiterate that the goal of RJ is not to reduce suspension rates. This work at Claremont pre-dates many of the statewide mandates and legal changes to school discipline codes that were meant to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Moreover, schools can easily reduce suspension rates by simply not suspending students and by ignoring inappropriate behaviors. Yet, this also fails to induce true character development towards a long-term and productive adult disposition for all students.

We have used RJ to help attach a language and process so that we can achieve what is the goal of all schools: develop our young students into capable, stable, fulfilled, and compassionate human beings ready for the 21st Century world.

I. Background

Humans are born to learn, but we don't learn in isolation. We learn based on positive relationships and interactions with peers and in environments like schools that foster opportunities for students and staff to learn and grow together.[1] Educators recognize this reality and keep the social and emotional health of their students a deliberate and central focus of learning. As educators partner with districts to move away from zero tolerance discipline policies and ramp up efforts to strengthen safe and supportive schools, address conflict, improve school climate, and build a positive school culture that students are connected to, many campuses are looking to implement alternative, restorative approaches.

There remains confusion in the education field over what restorative practices are and how they can help create safe learning environments through community building and redressing damage.[2] This toolkit was developed to illustrate how restorative strategies can be seamlessly integrated into the classroom, curriculum, and culture of schools. It defines what restorative practices are, explains why they are a transformational tool for fostering healthy relationships in schools and shows how they can be useful processes for students, educators, and learning communities.

This toolkit is intended for all educators who support the growth and health of students in schools. It is an introduction for those new to the concepts and will help support and enhance the work of teachers already implementing these practices in their classrooms. The toolkit includes digestible models, frameworks, and action steps for school-wide implementation, accompanied by guiding questions to support reflection for practitioners looking to make restorative methods part of the fabric of daily life in schools. It also recognizes the significant role all education professionals play in maintaining a school community that models respectful, trusting, and caring relationships.

II. What Are Restorative Practices?

Restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing.[3] Restorative practices are increasingly being applied in individual schools and school districts to address youth behavior, rule violations, and to improve school climate and culture.[4] Restorative practices can improve relationships between students, between students and educators, and even between educators, whose behavior often serves as a role model for students. They allow each member of the school community to develop and implement a school's adopted core values.

Restorative practices allow individuals who may have committed harm to take full responsibility for their behavior by addressing the individual(s) affected by the behavior. Taking responsibility requires understanding how the behavior affected others, acknowledging that the behavior was harmful to others, taking action to repair the harm, and making changes necessary to avoid such behavior in the future.

> "While conflicts of which I've been part often began with raised voices and closed ears, through restorative approaches they have ended in smiles, handshakes, and hugs. This seems ultimately more healthful for interpersonal relationships and overall school culture than traditional, reactionary disciplinary measures."
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> **— Allison, High School Math Teacher**

Restorative practices also represent a mindset that can help guide adult and youth behavior and relationship management in schools, not another program. They are

not intended to replace current initiatives and evidence-based programs like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or social and emotional learning models that assist in building a foundation and culture of caring. Programs and initiatives like PBIS complement restorative practices.[5] Restorative practices work when they are implemented school wide and integrated into the fabric of the school community. When the whole school is infused with restorative strategies, it becomes easier to address issues faster and respond in a thoughtful way because the caring and supportive culture is already present.[6]

> "Instead of learning from our behavior, schools just force us out without real conversations and interventions. Suspensions don't work, summonses don't work, arrests don't work. Keep us in the classroom, keep us accountable, and build relationships. That works."
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> **— Savannah, age 15**

Types of Restorative Practices

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is an evidence-based practice effectively used to reduce suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary referrals. Restorative justice focuses on righting a wrong committed and repairing harm done. The goal is to place value on relationships and focus on repairing relationships that have been injured. The victim and the wrongdoer have the opportunity to share with one another how they were harmed, as victims, or how they will work to resolve the harm caused, as wrongdoers.

Community conferencing

Community conferencing is a practice that provides students and educators with effective ways to prevent and respond to school conflict.[7] Community conferencing involves the participation of each person affected by the behavior and allows all stakeholders to contribute to the conflict resolution process.

Community service

Community service allows for individuals to restore a harm they may have committed to the school community by providing a meaningful service that contributes to their individual improvement.

Peer juries

Peer juries allow students, who have broken a school rule, and trained student jurors to collectively discuss why the rule was broken, who was affected, and how the referred student can repair the harm caused.[8]

Circle process

A circle is a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community, or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts, and problems. Circles can be used as a tool to teach social skills such as listening, respect, and problem solving. Circles provide people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in a safe atmosphere and allow educators and students to be heard and offer their own perspectives.[9] Circles can also be used to celebrate students, begin and end the day, and discuss difficult issues.[10]

Preventative and post-conflict resolution programs

Conflict resolution programs provide students with problem-solving and self-control skills.[11] These programs teach young people how to manage potential conflict, defuse situations, assuage hurt feelings, and reduce any inclination to retaliate after a conflict. Conflict resolution programs walk students through their emotions in the presence of one another and guide them through a team process of addressing the issues that gave rise to the conflict in the first instance. Because conflict resolution addresses and works to resolve the root causes of conflict, it helps prevent future incidents from occurring.

Peer mediation

One method of resolving conflict with student voice is through peer mediation. "Peer mediation is a demonstrably effective youth leadership model" that trains students to help other students resolve differences.[12] "Peer mediation recognizes that students can utilize conflict resolution practices and social skills to play a leadership role in increasing peace and reducing violence in their school."[13] Peer mediation has been shown to reduce discipline referrals, violence rates, and suspension rates.[12]

Informal restorative practices

Informal restorative practices are small ways educators and other school personnel can influence a positive environment. Examples include the use of *affective statements*, which communicate people's feelings, and *affective questions*, which cause people to reflect on how

their behavior has affected others;[15] proactive engagement with students and families; mentor relationships; community service; and lunchtime table talks.

Social-emotional learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning teaches skills such as "recognizing and managing emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. These are the skills that allow children and adults to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices." [16]