3. Benefits, Outcomes, and Impacts

Patience and perseverance are important when adopting new ways of handling conflict and wrongdoing. Though schools often see positive outcomes shortly after implementing restorative approaches, many reported that a couple of years passed before things really changed.

Positive Restorative Justice Outcomes

Positive outcomes can lead to change on the macro level. These include a realignment of funding in support of restorative practices. Re-evaluation of discipline practices spreads district-wide. Policies are adopted that include students and families in decision-making, leading to greater involvement and investment in neighborhood schools.¹

Summaries of Outcome Evaluations

At Cole Middle School, a pilot site for Restorative Justice in Oakland, California, restorative practices began in the 2005/06 school year. Significant benefits in terms of quantifiable data were noticeable between the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years when the suspension rate at the school dropped. The school had been suspending almost one third of the student population (30.3%). Following initial implementation of Restorative Justice, students suspended dropped to 10.3%. Perhaps more significant, 60% of those suspensions in 2006/07 were for students suspended more than once. In 2007/08, less than 20% of students were suspended more than once. Not only did Cole cut its suspension rate, but it also dramatically reduced repeat suspensions. The reduction in the number of days students were out of school had a significant fiscal effect. In 2006/07, the school lost $9,775 in daily attendance funding; in 2007/08, the school lost only $262. After two years of using Restorative Justice philosophy and practices, Cole Middle School’s California State Test (CST) scores went up by 74 points—from school year 2007/08 to 2008/09.

In 2009, the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) published Findings from Schools Implementing Restorative Practices, which highlighted outcomes from six schools in Pennsylvania—West Philadelphia High School, Pottstown High School, Newtown Middle School, Palisades High School and Middle School, and Springfield Township High School. These schools are in communities that range from urban to rural and from moderately affluent to poverty stricken. A summary of the findings in the report follows:

West Philadelphia High School has been one of Pennsylvania’s persistently dangerous schools for the last six years. The 913-student urban school began using restorative practices at the end of the 2007/08 school year, with formal training taking place in the autumn of 2008. The school experienced positive results in the first year of implementation. Violent acts and serious incidents

¹ When a school adopts Restorative Justice and includes those impacted by incidents at a school site, there is a tendency to branch out of the school into the community and nearby schools. Cole Middle School in Oakland, CA, became involved with the elementary feeder school two blocks away and increased communication with neighbors.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

- Reductions in the number and intensity of fights and physical altercations.
- Fewer classroom and cafeteria disruptions.
- Drastic reductions in the number of students suspended and expelled.
- Higher academic performance including standardized test score increases.
- Greater sense of safety in the school.
- A more positive school climate for students and school personnel.
- Healthier relationships among and between students and adults—including parents and guardians.
- Increased and more meaningful communication.