

Stories from Year 1 of SPFT/SPPS Restorative Practices Initiative

Why Restorative Practices (RP)?

Representatives of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers and the Saint Paul Public School district administration jointly agreed that piloting restorative practices as a strategy to improve school climate had four core objectives:

- 1) Students and educators will experience increasingly authentic, nurturing relationships
- 2) Harm within school settings will be recognized and repaired, with people who cause harm increasingly taking responsibility for actions, and supportive adults seeking to address root causes of misbehavior
- 3) Attendance improves (fewer unexcused absences, less chronic absenteeism)
- 4) Discipline becomes more equitable, less frequent

While it will take 2-5 years to fully implement and evaluate the implementation of RP, we theorize that improvement is cyclical and that increases in the first two objectives will lead to improvement in the last two which will begin the cycle of improvement. Thus, in the first year we are focused on the work of relationship building and beginning to address harm and discipline through restorative practices. Indicators of the first two objectives include assessing how restorative practices are changing the [students'](#) and [educators'](#) experiences of relationships and discipline at school. We explore these questions below through stories resulting from the first year of RP implementation in the six pilot schools. These stories were shared by principals and site leads during interviews in February 2017.

How are restorative practices changing [teacher and staff experiences of relationships and discipline at school](#)?

While it is too early to report a conclusive answer to this question, the following stories begin to illustrate how these changes may take hold across SPPS at schools that specifically aim for school-wide, high quality adoption of RP.

There was a staff that I've been working with more closely that would say things like, "I really thought RP was about the circle and that was the only thing: we sit in circle." But the more that this particular person learned, they were talking about living in a restorative way, where it's not just about the circle, but it's about "how I conduct myself with students. It's about what I say and how I say it in a way that's not demoralizing or shaming, but really trying to figure out okay, when to push when to pause and when to yield" to the different things that this particular person is seeing happening in the classroom.

A teacher and I had a particular conflict over scheduling and so there was some emailing that went back and forth and then I just went up to them to address it and check in. And this teacher was shocked that I came up to them and literally

articulated, “what you’re doing [in addressing conflict], this doesn’t happen.” And that was really telling to me in terms of how colleagues are treating each other. Because I just acknowledged I made a mistake and I pulled out a student longer than I had said and I wanted to acknowledge the work that particular teacher was doing and just wanted to check-in about it. At least from my perspective, what I saw from the response from that teacher is that it was very important and something that teacher had not experienced, multiple times.

Once Christmas is over, everyone says this is the core part with MCAs coming up and we gotta hit the ground running. So I’ve had teachers saying, “Can you come and do a circle about keeping the reaction small?” Or “we have a lot of drama going on, can you come and focus on that with our circle?” So during this [high stress] time, I see teachers understand the value of it.

Our thinking around RP last year was around offering professional development for our staff for the purpose of them using restorative practices for students. But then this year we found it important to model what we are asking because it is a mindset shift. It’s like work of the heart almost. And so to experience being in circle for example, or to use certain language with one another, is different than learning technical pieces of what you’re going to do with your student's. So you kind of feel firsthand the impact and the effects of being in that kind of a space where you’re going to share or you have opportunities to share who you are and aspects of your identity and what’s important to you, what you value or things like that to be put forth in a circle. To kind of feel that impact is different than just getting the technical pieces of restorative practices.

We recently did 3 hours worth of staff circle, including our para professionals and other staff members. One of the first things we did was ask what has been difficult and challenging. With 40 people in circle, that pass around took us 30 minutes. But my follow-up question was, “What inspires you to continue despite those challenges?” That pass, same 40 people, took an hour. And half-way through, someone called it and said, “We have talked longer...I cannot believe...[that we stay focused on this].” Because everyone knew we were in the middle of the January lull and morale was very low. But for that to take an hour and for people to stay a ½ hour longer than what we were supposed to stay speaks volume of just the culture that we’ve created, even among the adults, about it being really hard and there are an hour’s worth of reasons to keep coming back. There was laughter, there was tears, people sharing that they didn't feel like they were good enough at home because they take work with them at home. They didn't feel like they were good enough at school. And it allowed our leader to hear that and to end circle with, “You

are all enough. You are enough. You are here every day giving it your all. Yes, we always want to strive for improvement, and you're enough. And you need to take care of yourself so you can take care of our scholars." And there was a different sense at the end of that meeting than at other PD sessions that I've experienced because I think people felt closer together, being able to work through tears. Being able to hear each other's struggles and know, 'hey, I'm not alone with this, we're all feeling it.' And also really be able to share the successes and positives. I left so full, but yet calm. Because it was like reassurance that I am in the right place and this is the work that is necessary. That diversity helped too, because typically PD is not offered to everyone, so the diversity in that room made me feel real full too. And the feedback afterwards was that we needed to do more of this. It was a way that folks were really able to talk freely and be heard. A few said they came really skeptical but left really calm and just knowing that this is the right place and that the culture that we've created is so supportive. That is the theme for me on what inspires them to keep going: that everybody has your back. And that's the culture with adults, and when it's the culture with adults, the kids see that.

One of our 4th/5th grade teachers was having frustration around different issues in the class, and part of it was that the classroom was not a solid community. And the teacher had the opportunity to go to a two-day training with a local, experienced circle keeper and trainer. After we came back from that, she felt refreshed and excited to do a circle. At the training, we got to plan out a circle for her community, specifically a re-entry circle. And she did it when she got back and it went very well. She had been doing circle before, but it was based off the initial training, and just taking information and trying it and figuring it out on the fly. And that can work too. But having that training and having her going back and being that excited. It almost felt like the first day of school. She and I co-kept the circle together and it just went really well. The kids' faces lit up and I could see their involvement and excitement, and they could see her excitement and that changed their classroom community. It was a really good thing, just to watch that moment be able to affect change not only for herself, but for her to be able to be more effective for her students and her students to be able to be more effective for each other.

We have been pulling our specialist teachers together for PLCs and they are very unique personalities and all function very well on an island by themselves. But to bring them together with such different personalities is a little tricky. And we were trying to come to consensus and there are some very strong personalities that in a typical meeting would just dominate and there are others who would sit there and say absolutely nothing for an hour. And we held one of their PLC meetings in circle and the dynamic was so different than it would've been in knowing that group, if

those structures of the talking piece were not in place. I heard more from one staff member than I have in a very long time because she was given the opportunity. There is another staff member who would have dominated conversation and was not allowed to because of the talking piece. So that was neutralized and I think relationships have been strengthened because of hearing all perspectives.

We had a lot of momentum last spring with teachers wanting to learn more about restorative practices and there were lots of teacher voices and teacher leaders as part of that initial creation of the proposal. The week before school, one of our restorative practices trainings had to be cancelled because of a death in the family of the trainer and we had to reschedule and say “let’s all come in on a Saturday next month.” And our staff were all like “okay.” For the most part everybody was there and then we asked for an evening as a make-up day and everyone was able to make it. So that speaks to how valuable our staff believe this can be.

How are restorative practices changing student and family experiences of relationships and discipline at school?

While it is too early to report a conclusive answer to this question, the following stories begin to illustrate how these changes may take hold across SPPS. The primary drivers for these changes include new ways of [building community](#), [problem solving](#) and [repairing harm](#) at schools that specifically aim for school-wide, high quality adoption of RP.

Through building community

Our restorative practice leaders have established a calm way of dealing with things here. And what they've done is that we've had a group of the population over here that are good kids, they don't ever get in trouble. And they are quiet. But students who were usually quiet are talking to me more and making appointments to come see me because they feel comfortable due to the restorative practice ground work that has been done. And I've been here now for five years. I've never had this before. I always tell the students, “I'll listen to you. Just make what your proposal, go make an appointment with my assistant and then you come in here and we sit and talk.” And this is probably the first year this has happened to me, and this is more powerful than anything. Because they know, first of all, their voice is going to be heard. Second of all, they love and care about their school. And studies have shown students that care about their school are going to do better academically. They've got to believe the school cares about them too. But that's what those guys have done. They've got a population of 62 percent that never would say anything anybody else to where [they now say], “OK. Our voice is heard, is valued at this school.” That's huge.

This past week, we had a student that had a family member pass away. We had a substitute teacher who didn't know what to do because students were crying in the class. And I ended up going up, and it was clear to me they needed a circle. So we sat down in a circle and every single student except for one was crying. But all of them sharing about loss in their own lives. All of them wanting to give each other love and care through that. So I think to be able to share collectively both in pain, but then to be able to use it not only as a place to process what happened but then that was strong enough to hold that, like a container for that pain. And then to be able to do a really positive, uplifting activity together afterwards in a circle was really lovely. It was a space for them to be sharing and having empathy with each other and building stronger community through that.

We had flash mob of dancing in the cafeteria a few weeks ago. Some students started dancing and the kids who are often involved in antisocial behaviors, they think something else is going on. So they run up there like, and you can just see it's like, "what's with this?" So I think it's okay to create a central culture that's really prosocial and some of those other kids start realizing, "my attitude about this community is not what most kids have at this school." The community building part of restorative practices can help kids feel safe enough to express themselves. And teachers feeling safe enough to teach differently. So we know how it feels in the cafeteria and you know, that's cool when the kids... it was a senior project. She comes up, sets her stereo thing down, turns it up and she starts dancing pretty soon you've got 300 kids dancing, it's like, "well that's cool."

We had students lead a teacher workshop Friday last week. It was a "get to know me" circle. Students articulated what circle means to them and if it brings them value and if so what. And that was a really important thing for the students to do and I also think for the staff to see, "oh students value this thing. I'm not sure what it is but they seem to be doing really incredible great things. Cool let me tie into that." And then the kids had four questions they asked, "why are you a teacher? Why at this school? Why do you stay here?" And the kids each had their own stories and that was cool for a lot of people.

I've heard numerous times from students where we were in circle and they'd talk about how, "I didn't necessarily think that I had something to say that would add value and through these processes I'm learning that I have something to contribute."

One of the things that happens a lot here with the very racially diverse community, we have a majority Asian population, mostly Hmong, is that for our Black students there's definitely a sentiment of 'there's no room for us, there's no value for us.' So when we do circles and talk about fights or we talk about impact of Black history

month or lack of culture or diversity, we've heard our students, particularly our Black students, be able to voice that, "hey, we want a space in this particular place. And we want to have our experiences valued and celebrated." So I've heard students be able to talk about that in front of their peers and then I've heard other nonblack students say, "yes that's something we believe in too." I think that was really powerful for students to be able to hear that. From my perspective, I don't think there's a lot of cross dialogue happening between communities of color. So that for me was one thing that was very powerful was to be able to create and navigate or support those kinds of discussions.

A student wanted to do World Hijab Day for her senior project. There was involvement from staff in terms support and curiosity as well as students who got involved in discussions that day. She was able to have, in my opinion, a successful day and event with over 46 participants, students and staff wearing the hijab. And she had a debrief after school with 28 people, including 8 staff who stayed, and discuss what it was like, what questions they had. And I had to kick them out because of the time permitted. So I think that is evidence, particularly for students who are marginalized, or who are very small in terms of numbers, when a student says, "I want to share this about myself with this school," there is something that happened for them to feel the school and the relationships they have at school are strong enough to say, "this is something that I invite you to be in and to learn about."

We presented about our Restorative Practices work when we went to the board, and there was a parent there who said it was her 3rd year at our school, and she said when she walks in now there is a whole different calmness, a whole different sense of warmth about this school. And she said she was so grateful, because she has 3 girls here and they are so happy to come to school. And not that they weren't, but she said she can now feel the happiness they have about coming to school.

We had a parent say when she thinks about her own upbringing and education, nobody invited her to talk with the teacher. Nobody said, "I really want to hear your perspective." Or "what is happening, how can I help you?", if it's not related to content. She asked about all my flyers, all the words I might use, the questions. She asked for them to be translated so that she could use them at home.

Through problem solving

We even have some kids now that will say to each other, "That was a small problem. We got to keep that problem small," because that is common language we use in the building.

We had the most powerful circle with our head custodian, Mr. K. He's this giant 6 foot plus guy; he's the biggest gentle giant. He is always interacting with the kids and the kids adore him. He's like this amazing man. He came to the RP 101 on a Saturday, the whole day. He encouraged his team to join us on the makeup day and gave permission and paid them to come. In the lunchroom when he's cleaning, he's always interacting with kids. They like to see his muscles; he used to be a paramedic. He shared at the training, "I don't know much about teaching, but I sure like how we ask the kids how they feel." And so he knew about the RP work and he values it. And here's the thing, we've had some bathroom issues as all schools do and kids doing some disgusting things in the bathroom and it became a big problem. I invited Mr. K to come and we held the circle with the entire 3rd 4th and 5th grade boys, divided, not all at once. I led a circle and I had him share some of what was happening and the impact. And he came from the perspective, there was no blame, he said, "we all take such pride, this is our home, and I take such pride in making the school beautiful and safe for all of us." Then he took the perspective of his team and told how they would skip their dinner break just to make sure everything was cleaned up and they would go home late. And I interjected at times to ask questions like what time he started in the morning (5am) and what time his staff got home at night (10:30pm) and so forth. And then I asked what steps it would take to remove urine from the walls and floor. He literally shared from his heart and his pride of the team and how much he loves this building. You could've heard a pin drop because this man that they really adored, they didn't really make that connection. They don't – it's just really funny to them to pee on the floor and walls. Mr. K had taken some pictures and shared that..... Right afterwards, my prompt was, "Now hearing that, can you just share how you feel?" And they shared and oh my gosh the things that came out. And we talked about this not being a blaming, but a circle to talk about how to make it better. The next prompt was, "what's one thing you can do to help this." They took it from their heart. And all week long last week there were kids coming up to me telling me they picked up paper towels off the floor, turned off running water, saying by all of that "we are watching." And one of the boys who is not that fluent in English talked so emotionally about it, "I just don't understand how you would come into someone's house and pee on the floor. That just makes me so mad." And that was so hard for him to articulate but he did it so impactfully. Then, the last prompt was, "How do you feel now?" And they heard Mr. K say, "I feel so hopeful." It was 100 times better than I anticipated in terms of the outcome,

because I couldn't prescribe it because I wanted it to him to be the lead. And it came from the heart and you could see the impact in the faces. It went so well that we did it again yesterday with our 1st graders about bathroom usage.

We've had several situations in the middle school when there was going to be a large fight, somebody was saying, 'we need this circle' and seeing that as a way to deal with harm and problem solve together. I'm seeing students understand they're entering the school community and don't just have to feel anxiety about a conflict that just happened with another student, that there's a process they're going to go through before they are back in that space together.

I had a girl come to me saying, "Can we do a circle with this teacher because he always makes me move seats or sometimes he'll send me out because I respond really loudly when this other kid makes faces at me." And so the four of us had a circle. So it was the girl who would scream out loud in response to the boy making faces at her and they both admitted their part in it. So then the teacher was able to do some negotiating with them about not doing those things. But then also see them in such a way that he wouldn't be able to make faces at her. And then she also agreed that if it happened she wouldn't completely overreact. In that situation, the boy who was making faces was White and the girl was African-American. So students of color are seeing this as a way to be able to have people hear their perspective.

A teacher used a circle when her math class wasn't working. She sat everyone down and used the circle to kind of brainstorm different ideas about how they can make their class stronger together.

Our kids feel that they can come in and ask, say, "I'm having a problem and I'd like to do a restorative practice." That's happened and it's happened with me a couple times where kids have come up to me and said, "Hey, I'm having this problem, can we sit down and do a restorative practice?"

We have had a lot of students who have sat down with teachers, so instead of it just going on in a bad way with a teacher for a long time, having the family there, having the teacher there, being in a circle and problem solving together. It has been profoundly changing for their relationship to the school and for how invested they feel in that relationship with the teacher. Some students have actually requested then a celebration circle to celebrate the progress they've made.

At the beginning of this school year, there were some fights that happened. In our senior leadership class of 36 students, we were able to do some processing in terms of what does that mean and how does that impact us. And that spurred "sit with me"

and “talk with me” initiatives. They said, “Well some of those young kids don’t think anybody understands them.” So they went to some training with our social workers about leading peer groups. And they started this group and so the kids can call them, send them social media notes and then they’ll sit down and talk. So they started that “talk with me” initiative and they started a “sit with us” group in the cafeteria. Every couple weeks they pull some tables aside and they say “come sit with us.” So they’re trying to actually pull the community together. These ideas came out of circle conversations. So it wasn’t just like accidental.

We have done a lot of restorative practices work with our EBD students, and many went from blowing up all the time and getting suspended to being able to say, “I’m irritated.” Through restorative practices and through “how big is your problem?” We added the “zones of regulations” to be able to talk in circle and to really be able to understand what is going on. So they were able to take ownership and have some words that they can use. So we knew what was going on with them and that worked so much where one of our students went from always being suspended, mom coming up mad at the school, and [at the school] we’re worried about her coming up because she’s mad, to him being able to play basketball his last year, 8th grade and actually being an active part of the school, and his mom coming to school, and being a part of games. Everything was a lot better for that student.

We have a 5th grader that came to our school who has actually bounced around to lots of schools, has a really complex home life and often times is filled with lots of frustrations of the equity around him. He came yesterday, walked in in the morning, came into my office and said, “I am so pissed right now.” And I asked him to tell me more. “My class is so irritating to me.” And as we talked a bit, I said, “What is it that we can do to fix this?” He said, “Can you come in and do a circle and tell them to not be so annoying.” Those were his exact words. But the whole point we got to was that they were teasing each other about girl-boy crushes and relationships. And that can be really impactful. And his bottom feeling was embarrassment but he wasn’t able to get to that. But he was able to ask me to come in and tell them “to stop being so annoying.” And we did have a circle about impactful words and gossip and boy-girl relationships. We didn’t get that deep, but it was huge. He often asks me to meet with him and another student individually, but this was the first time it was a whole class.

I had a conversation with a staff member this morning. Staff member was having a bad day. And they’ve always been restorative practice. They’re part of my team that do this every day. And they’re having a bad day. Students stop what they were doing and said, “How can we help meet your needs, because you’ve always helped meet our needs. How can we work with you?” That’s when that community starts to come

together whereas even though we've got different roles, I care enough about you as a person to if I see you fall, I am willing to reach out, pull you up. That's the piece that I love seeing. I saw it, just like, "Wow". And I asked the teacher why? And they said, "That child needed something, and I helped guide them through a process when we did a restorative practice. And then I needed something. They reached out and helped me." And I believe that's powerful because us as adults don't have all the answers. But we cannot underestimate the good will that is in our students and how much they care about us and what we give them too.

Through repairing harm

Recently, there was a young person that had been being seriously bullied in class, so him and his family came in. There were two other students [involved] and I was able to get in all of their families. And they actually had all faced bullying at different times. So we were able to do a restorative circle, talking about what happened, talking about that hurt. And talking about the wounded-ness everyone had felt. It was really beautiful. It happened to all be mothers, and seeing the mothers collectively love on this one student that had been harmed while also holding accountable their own kid in it, but also loving their own students. It was really beautiful and I think really transformative. And everyone left crying, but also left with these three young people being really strong with each other and in restored relationship. Moving on and out of that, all 3 mothers wanted to be part of anti-bullying efforts at this school, saying, "Could we do more of this? We have to deal with things this way." So I was really proud that the mother moved from, "I want these students suspended immediately," to "how do we actually solve this" and felt really good about that process.

We've had youth that have struggled with each other, who have come together through these practices. And their typical thing would have been, 'we're going to fight it out.' But really being able to look at each other and share and honestly reflect on what was going on with them. And honestly share all the things outside of this building that were impacting them at that moment, and seeing more common ground. And then in the future, requesting circles as a way to deal with problems before they escalate.

The family ones together have been most powerful. We had one with two fathers coming together with two young men. Both fathers ended up crying, actually. One father came in really angry. There had been harm caused to his student. But he was able, through that process, to recognize that both boys had been harmed. Both fathers were able to come together and recognize that they had never been in a

process where they – both had spent time incarcerated – where they had an opportunity to make things right.

I think about a time where we brought three families together and when you bring families together too you learn so much about the uniqueness of each family and all three families have different stories. Bringing these three girls together that can't get along and you learn something about their families too that you probably normally wouldn't learn. It was interesting because we didn't ask them to say anything about their home life, but one family said the father lived in a different state. Another said it's hard for her to raise her daughter and another one talked about the husband being in prison. One family member came with all these other little siblings and she's trying to raise the children. So you actually learn more about their family too which I find is pretty unique. It gives you some background that you might not even know about. But it was interesting that the families were still willing to come in with all their other things going on in their personal life. They still show up to school and we're still getting families that show up.

We had a student that did something that really harmed a teacher. The teacher could've made it a legal issue but didn't. We ended up meeting together with the student, student's parent and the teacher. And there was serious harm. It was sad, it felt really hard. And the student made a plan of how she was going to make that right, how she was going to give back to this teacher, how she was going to really do some things to help this teacher out and give back to this community. And their relationship was OK before. But after that, seeing their relationship strengthen through the conflict, and now they are working really well together. And now this student that never participated in class, is now participating in class.

A young man in our middle school went through circle with several staff and someone else. And at the end of it, for him to be able to say, "Thank you. Thank you for helping me learn. Thank you for being my teachers." And he is a student for whom a lot of people might think, "oh, he can't reflect on his stuff." But to be able to be able to be there, not be shamed, but have an opportunity to talk about what happened and really heal through that was just really beautiful.

I had one student who sat here with tears rolling down his face for 25 minutes. And we just waited it out. I talked about different things, I asked him things that he could just nod or shake his head to. But it wasn't going to work to do repairing harm work right then. But miraculously, after trying all different ways, that student really connected with a restorative practices expert who helps guide the work in our school, and he opened up to her like I've never seen. He doesn't open up. So I saw firsthand how he identified her as like his role model, like his mom. And he was

willing to share and express. He told her some things that we were all blown away by. Because we had tried 3-4 different times and it just wasn't working. And she was here one day and helping me at lunch, and sat down at the table and was chatting with them as a whole. And he came to her and started talking and she said, "Well would you ever like to come and have a circle with me?" And he did. And the intent wasn't necessarily that it would go deep, it was just to talk about things. But he did and it was amazing. And that day, the teacher came to me and said, "What happened? I've never seen him this happy." It was so cool. And typically for something like that, what rings in the back of my head from my experience in other buildings is, [stern, loud tone] "Well if you're not going to talk and tell us what's wrong, you need to go back to class because you're not going to stand out here. You need to be back in your class because you cannot miss anymore." And here, we know something was really missing because nobody wants to be sitting out in the hallway and not being part of class. He knows he's not in there, but he's also not capable of hearing anything. So sometimes they don't even know how to articulate what they're feeling but they know it's not there and if we truly want to show them that we care, we can't just go, "OK we tried to ask your needs and you didn't share so go back to class."

At the beginning of this year, I had two young ladies who actually didn't know each other, didn't know each other's name but were kind of egged on by their peers and got into an altercation. We sat down the next day, because that was what the time allowed, since one of the parents wanted them to go home, not because they had to. But the next day, we sat them down. They were like "I don't even know your name." So even starting with conversation of "State your name, state something about you that person doesn't know." And they had so much in common. So now they aren't necessarily friends, but they are able to communicate with one another and greet each other in the hall. And it doesn't feel unsafe or anything now, it feels like they have a better understanding, because they had the chance to restore and repair with one another, versus both going home, see you in a couple of days, the a regular suspension. And that for me, in that moment, I was like, "This is it." You know, you just get that feeling that this is just what needs to happen every time as much as it can.

We had a group of 6 young ladies, ongoing bullying that led to a confrontation. We knew things weren't great and that we needed to set something up but the confrontation happened first. So we brought all parties involved and we felt like we'd be able to move forward. Total disaster. We brought the person that caused harm to the person that was harmed, along with allies that were involved. There was so much domination within the circle that I don't think anyone heard anybody.

There was a stale feeling that both keepers felt, and it was very chaotic. So we went back to the drawing board, and I also took it to the last meeting of the site leads and got feedback. And so with that feedback, we sat everyone down individually and had interviews, and talked about allies and social power within the circle. So we identified where the power was within the circle. We removed that person and had another circle with the others bringing in people who would support them. And that's how we held circle today. And moving forward, the two people who had the social power, we're going to hold circle with them and their supporters separately. And eventually we'll bring them all back. But the circle today was totally different. It was funny to see the person that felt the harm, she totally came as herself and was able to be present as herself, as opposed to before when she had her head down and would constantly pass. She was herself, her age – silly, goofy. But I was almost taken aback by how different she was. So it will be interesting to see how it goes with the other two next week. And in closing I said, "Turn to your neighbor and tell them one thing you appreciate about them." And my neighbor turned to me and said, "I appreciate you having circle today." It made me feel like a champion, you know?

I had a circle yesterday between two students who are at least friendly if not friends where the one student was completely taking advantage of the fact that the other student was very mellow and was trying to boss him around and swearing at him and the teacher sent him out. And it took me two hours for the student who got sent out to calm down enough to understand how his words and his actions may have impacted someone that he considers a friend and other people around him. Because he was just playing, for him it didn't matter. So it literally took two hours to get to a point where he was willing to understand that even though he didn't see taking advantage of his friends' calm that maybe everyone else in the whole world would call that taking advantage of his friends' calm.

We had an incident where a student was screaming out in class whenever there was a surprise in the book or whenever the teacher would give a direction something like, "Now take a couple of minutes and jot down a new vocabulary word" or something. He would scream out loud in class every single time, "Jesus Christ!" Every time. And so this teacher is very centered on religion. And she said to him, "Please don't use that name, it's a swear word, it offends me." And then he kept doing it and then she said that she felt like it was offensive and she would prefer that he not do that and that he should respect it as much as any other religion because she doesn't hear him saying Muhammad or Buddha or anything else. She didn't see the problem with saying that. The kid went crazy, said that she was a racist and that she assumed that since he was from Africa he was Muslim and that he wasn't. And on it went. And so the two of them were both right, both wrong. So I

had conversations with them about perspectives and then they came together and they were able to share the perspective of, “when I hear this, this is what I think you mean, that's what it sounds like to me.” And so that was a really powerful circle where they were both able to sort of understand that, maybe not see the other person like OK that makes sense I like that. But at least appreciate, “Oh. So what I said could have been taken this way”. So it was it was a strong turnaround.

We do an environmental and multicultural retreat every year and we take 70 kids to Finland, Minnesota. We went there and they got up there the day before that huge snowstorm the week before Thanksgiving. So the first night went OK because they checked in and went to sleep. The second night, there was a dorm room of boys that got into an argument that was getting to the point of physical. And we could hear it. And their chaperone got to the room and brought them out. And we knew at this point like they had done enough that, had it been a normal year we would have called the parents and said you need to come and get them. But it was really hard driving there so we knew that probably wasn't an option anyway. We wanted to try doing circles so we did a circle with them and they had had enough practice by that point already that they listened to each other's perspectives. They didn't talk over each other and they were able to sort of fix their relationship. So it was like a choice and they were able to solve it. And what was really great about this group is they were like, “check, done”, and they moved on and were able to be a really strong group during all the group activities for the rest of the time.

There was an incident on a bus and one of our students that's been with us for three years came into the office and he said, “I know you're going to suspend me, I get it. Let's just call my dad,” were the first words out of his mouth. So immediately, we just said, “No, no. No you're not going to get suspended.” This was all of three or four weeks into the school year, maybe a little longer. So he had been through circle every single day. He knew how to do circle. We told him we were going to do circle. Our coordinator did an amazing job preparing him with what to expect, that it is different than our pro-social circle. It's a repair circle. She asked if he wanted an advocate in circle and who he would bring. He invited an adult who he has a close relationship to in the building. It's one of the first repair circles we did and it still remains one of the most powerful. This young man who has a history of significant behavior in our building was able to own his behavior, understand the pain he created by doing that, and he has reduced his referrals to the office by more than 60 percent in the year since circle happened. So he just was able to understand his impact in a way by participating in that that we had not been able to create for him before. Because our tools were more limited in how we responded to behavior

My daughter was graduating from Minnesota State Mankato in December and I had to leave the school early. It's the first time I've ever put myself, my family in front of the school, and I've been in this business since '91. First time ever. As I went down to Mankato, some of our students made some poor choices, and were walking throughout the school and doing whatever they wanted to do, because they knew I wasn't here. I was with my family and I'm getting phone calls, "These kids are doing this in school, these kids are doing that, these kids are doing this." And it was frustrating for me because I'm trying to do something with my family. And some people that I left behind couldn't do what I expected them to do. And the students did not listen; they will listen to me, but there are certain people they won't listen to. I was frustrated that our students weren't listening to our staff. I was frustrated that our staff wasn't able to communicate clearly with our students. And we decided to have a talking circle about that. One of the students said, "I never saw that side of you." I said, "It's in me." But then on the other hand, I understood the student's perspective too and they said, "We thought it was acceptable because we didn't have a place to go when it's cold outside. And the school means so much to us to where we don't want to go home." I said, "I understand that, but still you understand how mad I am too now." And so we both gave our opinions and it was a pretty heated conversation. And then afterwards, they understood they had never seen that side of me. But then I told them, "I'm glad our school was something special to you. But also too, you got to respect people that are in charge and I put in charge. And you got to respect if somebody is doing something with their family, that's like gold to somebody. Because at the end of the day, your families are the most important thing you have." But then you've got to tell them why it's important to you because if they don't come from that same type of background, it allowed me a chance to explain what I was feeling. They got a chance to explain why they chose to do what they did. And that was powerful for all of us.

We had a circle with a specific 7th grade classroom where there was this physical altercation that happened in that room between 2 students and that impacted not only those two individuals who were involved in that, but also the community and the class. And through that discussion, there were powerful statements that were made from classmates in saying, "I understand where you're coming from. I understand your frustration." And there were other comments where students were able to say, "I am fearful that this could happen to me." And they were able then to speak their truth. And these are students who don't say anything in the classroom. But for them to really be empowered and have that voice spoke to the importance of and the values that we talked about, the principles of restorative practices. And at the end of the day, after that discussion, and that guided circle, that student was able to take ownership of his behavior, was able to understand that he did harm in this

situation and that he caused a rift in the community but he was able to amend that rift and that harm.

A few of us were greeting one morning at the front doors and a boy just came in, he didn't speak and went straight upstairs. And this massive fight broke out on the third floor. And teachers got involved, and had to separate them. Two girls ended up getting beat up. They all got suspended, or whatever. Now other kids are upset. Other male students are upset, saying when these boys come back, they're going to beat them up, they're going to jump 'em, you know, "why would you do that to a girl?" So this was a real issue in the building. So when the student came back, we decided to do a circle. First we did a circle with all the teachers on the third floor, and the assistant principal and ran a circle with the student. He's not one who is really able to take in what people say. So we set the rules for the teachers and everything to understand that. And they were able to get their point across about what happened and how they felt when this was going on. And the student was able to speak his truth as well. That moment is when we kind of knew that it would work for the whole building because those teachers wanted to know more about it since it worked out really nice with that young man. And then we did the same thing with some students who were really upset with him. We had a smaller circle with those students. And they expressed, "I didn't like what happened." And he understood. He spoke his truth, knowing he was wrong. But also saying how he thought some of those guys were his friends and not knowing that they would want to fight him. It worked out really nice as well. No other fights broke out from that situation, or anything from that situation. So even though we did suspend first, when he came back for the re-admit, we did those circles and it was nice.