From the Superintendent

I continue to be impressed and inspired by the Restorative Practices work being done throughout our district. We are only half-way through our first year of full implementation, and I can see and feel the difference when I visit our schools and talk with students and faculty. I have heard from several teachers that their students feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, and that students are learning more positive and effective ways to express themselves and be heard. We are working hard, every day, to build school communities where kids are caring for kids, and better understand the impact their actions have on their peers. Our students and teachers are building mutual trust and respect and the work is bearing fruit in fewer discipline issues, referrals and more productive class time.

More than 87% of our teachers have received Restorative Practices training, along with a significant number of administrative and support staff. As we move forward, we will work to deepen the knowledge of those already engaged in the practice and will continue to train new staff members as they come on board. Thank you to our community members and Pinellas County Schools staff for working together for the betterment of our students and our schools.

Dr. Michael A. Grego, Superintendent

Many Options for Circles

Circles can be used for many activities. Here is an example of how a circle was to engage staff at Clearwater Fundamental Middle School.

Teacher Feedback Circle
I recently ran a PLC with my teachers at Clearwater Fundamental Middle School as a follow up on the active assailant drills. I knew what the police thought, but I wanted to hear what the teachers thought. I invited our resource officer to the meeting. We held a circle and I had three people in charge of different posters. The question was then asked: “share a positive, opportunity or question you might have regarding the active assailant drills.”

-Principal Stephanie Joyner
2 X 10 Challenge at Rawlings

The school-based Restorative Practices Intervention Team at Marjorie K. Rawlings Elementary meets once a month to keep teachers and staff on track and to support them with restorative practices in their classrooms. Recently, it was decided to bring back the book Better Than Carrots or Sticks by Dominique Smith, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey as a book study. In Chapter 4, Peace Building: Using Informal Restorative Practices Every Day, Rawlings’ staff read about the 2X10 strategy. One way to build trust is to spend two minutes each day for 10 consecutive days, talking with a student about anything other than school.

It was decided as a staff to take on the 2X10 challenge. Each staff chose one student, in their classroom or on campus, to give this a try. Based on survey results, over half of the staff felt like this strategy was effective in decreasing behaviors, not eliminating them. Ninety-two percent felt that this time helped them to build a stronger relationship with their student. One hundred percent stated they would like to use this strategy with another student. One staff member said “it was nice getting to know a student on a deeper level and it allowed them to talk with me about whatever they wanted”.

As a result of the positive feedback, the challenge was extended for another 10 days. In the end, it’s all about building relationships. Strong relationships pave the way for success in learning and life!

In Practice....

At Kings Highway Elementary School, the staff incorporated circles into their classes to build connections and to teach content.

Lisa Kinney’s fifth grade scholars have taken ownership of their circle time. Recently, they proposed to their teacher an “end of the week” circle to continue building their classroom community and to wrap up the week. Two of the questions developed by the scholars were sharing favorite sports and summing up their week in one word. Circles like these help Ms. Kinney’s class create a classroom of acceptance where all voices are valued.

During their Language Arts instruction, the third grade scholars in Melody Park’s class circled up for their lesson. During this circle, the scholars worked together to brainstorm what was needed for their writers’ toolbox. Ms. Park’s class used the circle to build collective knowledge of what is needed to be a successful student in writing.

“In culturally responsive schools validate and affirm all student and family cultures, and focus on the strengths of each individual.”—Florida PBIS
Ms. Bielicki (school counselor) teaches a content lesson on tolerance to first grade students.

MTSS and Restorative Practices are aligned to ensure success

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a continuum of integrated academic and behavior supports, interventions, social-emotional learning (SEL), and culture, that reflects the need for students to have fluid and equitable access to effective curriculum, instruction and supports at varying levels of intensity. This defined process helps to achieve equity by providing a ‘defined process that ensures learners’ socio-economic status, gender, race, and disability, are not barriers to educational opportunities and academic success. It is designed to meet the needs of learners across diverse groups.

Within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model, Florida’s Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support (PBIS) is the tiered framework for implementing culturally relevant and evidence-based practices such as Restorative Practices and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies. This approach requires the systematic use of data to guide school-level decisions.

Restorative Practices’ strategies and approaches honor high expectations and belonging-centered practices that help students feel socially connected, supported, and respected within the community. In this relationship and community-building model, adults and students are committed to a culture of high expectations and accountability. They are also committed to developing the necessary cultural and academic supports that provide meaningful opportunities for learning. Restorative Practices promotes advance resources and opportunities that encourage positive behaviors and improve the academic and social skills, habits, and capacities of all students.

“\textit{It is when we are willing to reflect deeply and respond appropriately to the impact of our biology, psychology and biography on the way we interact with others, only then can we begin the journey that moves from indifference and sympathy to that of empathy. Then and only then do we become restorative.}”

- Johnetta Haugabrook, MTSS/RTI Staff Developer
Perkins Elementary fourth-graders share their restorative circles experiences

- “People are nicer and listening more and not interrupting. Kids are getting nicer and not so sassy and grumpy.”
- “You are in a little tiny community so you feel more open. I feel like I can tell the class and my teacher my needs.”
- “I think it gives everybody a chance to talk.”
- “It makes me feel a bit more confident and happier because it makes me get to know everybody a bit more. It makes me happy to hear their stories.”
- “In the circle it gives us a chance to all talk. When a teacher asks a question sometimes we don’t all get to answer but in circle we do. It makes me feel more open because you know more about people that you never knew about.”
- “Usually I never had the guts to talk to my teacher and tell them how I feel but the circle makes me feel like it is a community and I can share anything.”
- “It gives the opportunity for introverts to be extroverted.”

Graphically Restorative

A Tale of Two Schools
Carlos had a heated argument with his parents before leaving for school, so he’s running late. Let’s see the difference that restorative policies and practices can make.

Zero-tolerance education system
- He is greeted by metal detectors and a police search.
- His teacher scolds him in front of the class. Carlos talks back, and is given a detention.
- A school police officer detains and arrests both students.
- Carlos is held in a juvenile detention facility all afternoon, missing school. He now has an arrest record and is facing suspension.

Restorative practices-based education system
- Teachers and administrators welcome him and his fellow students as they enter.
- His teacher waits until after class to speak with Carlos to learn more, and sets up a meeting with his school counselor.
- Student peer mediators and support staff intervene, have the students sit down together, and de-escalate the situation.
- Carlos and the other student agree to help clean the cafeteria during a free period. Carlos meets with his counselor and parents after school to help resolve the conflict at home.

Learn more about restorative practices: www.otlcampaign.org/restorative-practices