

Applying Restorative Justice Practices to Minneapolis Public Schools Students Recommended for Possible Expulsion

A Pilot Program Evaluation of the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program

INTERIM REPORT – August 2, 2011

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The funding for this program evaluation comes from the Minnesota State Office of Justice Programs, JAG-ARRA grant. In addition, University of Minnesota staff are supported by the Healthy Youth Development Prevention Research Center (CDC: U48 DP001939).

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Abstract/Summary

In many schools across the country “zero tolerance” disciplinary policies rely on suspensions and expulsions to prevent violence and maintain security. Critics of these policies argue that they do not address causal factors and restrict administrators’ options, often leading to punishment that is inequitable. Some schools are turning to alternative models for discipline, intended to keep students in class and avoid the negative outcomes related to suspension and expulsion. One such alternative is a disciplinary policy based on a restorative justice framework designed to hold a student accountable for his/her actions while acknowledging the student’s individual circumstances. Since 2008, Minneapolis Public Schools has offered restorative justice services for students recommended for expulsion, in partnership with community organizations such as the Legal Rights Center of Minneapolis.

This interim technical report summarizes the pilot evaluation of the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program (RCP), implemented by Legal Rights Center staff in conjunction with MPS staff. This interim report focuses on data from student and parent/guardian surveys collected from March, 2010 through June, 2011. It does not yet include analysis of school record data on students, which is currently being collected and analyzed during the summer of 2011. These data will include unexcused absences, days attended, number of behavioral referrals, and indicators of academic achievement.

The evaluation design of the RCP consists of pre- and post-conference surveys of student participants that assess student outcomes related to program satisfaction, awareness of community supports, positive communication with family members, increased levels of problem solving and connection to school, and reduced levels of problematic behavior at school. Parents/guardians also complete pre- and post-conference surveys to rate their satisfaction with the program, awareness of community and school supports, and communication with their child. To test for significant change between responses at the pre-conference and the post-conference survey, paired t-tests were conducted using the SPSS statistical software package.

Results reported here are from an initial analysis of student and parent survey outcomes (assessed data collected from March 2010 – June 2011). A total of 46 students and 49 family members completed pre-conference surveys during this time period. Descriptive information on demographic characteristics of students referred to the program is provided, in addition to an analysis of attrition that compares participants who completed both surveys to those who did not complete the follow-up survey. A total of 27 students and 35 family members filled out the post-conference survey (approximately 6 weeks later), yielding follow-up rates of 59% and 71%, respectively.

Highlights of interim evaluation results (March, 2010 – June, 2011) include the following:

- high levels of program satisfaction were reported by both students and parents/guardians who also voluntarily wrote comments regarding their opinions about good and bad parts of the program and what was helpful or missing
- students report positive, significant increases, from pre-conference to post-conference, in their ability to make good choices about how to act, even when they are upset
- compared to pre-conference, students are more likely to agree that they know someone they could

ask for help at school on the follow-up survey

- students report significantly less fighting at the post-conference survey
- positive trends of increases in family communication are being reported both by students and their family members on the post-conference survey
- compared to the pre-conference survey, parents/guardians report significantly higher levels of connection to their child's school on the post-conference survey, in addition to greater awareness of community resources to help them support their child to do better at school

I. Introduction

School Misbehavior: A Local Context Overview

Each year the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) collects data on disciplinary incidents at public schools through the Disciplinary Incident Report System (DIRS) and produces an annual report in accordance with state law (Minnesota Statutes Section 121A.06, Subdivision 3). All Minnesota school districts and charter schools are required to report to DIRS any disciplinary incident resulting in a student being out of school for more than one day or involving the possession of a dangerous weapon. It is important to note that minimal attempts are made to verify DIRS data entered by individuals, and conclusions drawn from these data reflect differences in staff training for data entry, district policies and enforcement, and accuracy of the original incident reports. Because of these differences, DIRS data sets should not be compared across years.¹ According to the most recent DIRS dataset,¹ the majority of disciplinary incidents involve disruptive or disorderly conduct and occur in the classroom during school hours. Most student offenders are males in grades 8-10 and receive out-of-school suspension as a consequence. The following information on type of incidents and characteristics of offenders comes from state DIRS data for the 2008-2009 school year.¹

School Incidents. There were 60,398 reported disciplinary incidents in schools across the state during the 2008-09 school year. The largest group of incidents was classified as disruptive/disorderly conduct/insubordination (36%), followed by fighting (17%), and assault (6%), while verbal abuse and threats or intimidation each represented 5% of the total. The remaining types of incidents covered a wide range of severity from weapons violations to tobacco use, and included incidents such as alcohol use, illegal drugs, gang activity, bullying, and theft. Among the 1,377 incidents involving a weapon (2% of total incidents), the most common type involved was a pocket knife (48%); hand guns were involved in only 14 cases (less than 1%). Approximately 97% of all disciplinary incidents occurred during school hours; classrooms were the most common sites, followed by other indoor areas and hallways. Disciplinary incidents involved one or more victims just over 70% of the time, but rarely included property loss; for those which incurred property damage, costs were less than \$250.00 on average.

Offenders. Most student offenders were in 9th grade (16%) followed by 8th grade and 10th grade (15% each), and 3 out of 4 were male. Students identified as White, Non-Hispanic make up 76% of the Minnesota student population, but constituted only 43% of the offenders in disciplinary incidents. In contrast, Black students make up only 10% of the Minnesota student population, but represented almost 40% of offenders. The disproportionate minority representation in DIRS reports was substantial. African American students were 5.9 times more likely to be suspended, and 3.8 times more likely to be expelled than White students, while American Indian students were 4.1 times more likely to be suspended and 6.2 times more likely to be expelled than White students.² Hispanic students were 2.5 times more likely to be suspended and 2.5 times more likely to be expelled than White students.²

Disciplinary Actions. The overwhelming majority (87%) of disciplinary actions taken by schools officials was out-of-school suspension. Students receiving out-of-school suspension missed an average of 2.5 school days. The next most frequent action taken was in-school suspension, representing only 8% of the total. Expulsion occurred in 286 cases and represented only 1% of the total, but 715 students left their school by other means, including withdrawal, transfer, administrative transfer, exclusion, or unilateral

removal to an alternative educational setting. Based on these data, Nancy Riestenberg, School Climate Specialist with the Minnesota Department of Education described the disciplinary climate in Minnesota public schools: "Not all school districts have a zero tolerance policy, but all districts use suspensions as a disciplinary response."³

School Discipline: Zero-Tolerance Strategies

Since the 1990s, schools across the U.S. have adopted tough disciplinary approaches to deal with students' use of drugs, alcohol, and violence.⁴ These approaches, known as "zero tolerance" policies, stem from the criminal justice system and were originally meant to address the most violent weapons offenses⁴ but have since become the primary reaction to a broad range of behavior issues that vary widely in severity.⁵ Zero tolerance policies are based on deterrence and retribution. Such strategies are generally absolute and authoritarian;^{4,6} they emphasize uniformity and the isolation of offenders, and frequently rely on suspension or expulsion.^{5,6} For example: in accordance with the federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, Minneapolis Public Schools Policy 4025 (Drug-Free and Weapons-Free Schools and Workplace) requires that any student who brings a firearm to school be expelled for at least one year.⁷ Since the widespread implementation of zero tolerance policies, measures of violent incidences in schools have remained relatively stable, but no causal relationship between implementation of policies and violent student behaviors has been established.⁵

Critics of zero tolerance policies argue that these strategies do not address causal factors and restrict administrators' abilities to respond based on individual circumstances, often leading to punishment that is unfair and inequitable.^{4,5} Additionally, zero tolerance policies' reliance on suspensions and expulsions is problematic and exclusionary; suspending a student from school actually prevents the student from accessing services meant to improve school performance and address behavior problems.^{2,8} Research also demonstrates that suspension and expulsion are associated with a number of negative outcomes including negative self-image, drug use, avoidance of school staff, decreased academic achievement, delinquency, and school dropout.^{2,5,9}

The punitive, exclusionary concepts behind zero tolerance are focused on violence prevention and maintaining security for students in many schools across the country.⁵ However, some schools are also turning to alternative models for discipline, where the primary goal is to keep students in class and avoid disruption to educational progress.^{4,8} One such alternative is a policy based on a restorative justice framework.

The Concept of Restorative Justice

Based on the ideas that crime causes harm and offenders are obligated to repair the harm they have caused,¹⁰ restorative justice is an alternative conceptual framework used to guide responses to crime or misbehavior.^{5,11} Restorative practices engage all those with a stake in the situation in discussion to define the harm caused, hold the offender accountable, support the victim, and decide what can be done to repair the harm.^{8,10,11} In schools, these stakeholders often include student offenders, student and/or staff victims and their supporters, the offending student's parents or guardians, school administration, and can include bystanders and classmates, responding police officers or other security personnel, guidance counselors, school social workers, and teachers.^{5,11}

In contrast to a zero tolerance framework, restorative justice is considered to be authoritative and participatory rather than authoritarian and punitive;⁵ this can be thought of as authority figures responding to behavioral incidents by doing something “with” a student rather than “to” them.¹² This approach is designed to hold a student accountable for his/her actions while acknowledging the student’s individual circumstances.⁵ In this way, restorative practices address the negative behavior as well as the conditions that caused it, and give school administration the flexibility to choose options that focus on the true nature of the problem, rather than the technical offense.^{5,8}

An important aspect of restorative justice practices is that they empower victims, families, school staff and offenders by putting them in active roles: all are given the opportunity to express needs and problem-solve, and offenders are given the responsibility of repairing the harm and thus earning redemption rather than passively receiving punishment.^{5,8,10} The necessarily voluntary nature of the process is emphasized, as is the effectiveness of non-adversarial meeting between stakeholders in a safe and non-threatening environment.⁸

Restorative Practices in Schools

Out of the framework of restorative justice, specific practices or methods have been developed and modified from the criminal justice system for use in schools. School-based restorative practices were documented in Australia and New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s^{6,13} and were frequently based on traditional community conflict resolution processes used by the Maori to re-establish harmony between individuals and their community.¹⁴ In the U.S., restorative practice in schools first gained attention in Minnesota and Pennsylvania in the 1990s.^{6,12,15} A variety of restorative practices are used to respond to student conflict and behavior problems. In general, such practices fall into two main categories: 1) restorative classroom management approaches, and 2) restorative intervention practices.¹⁶

Restorative classroom management approaches seek to create safe learning environments by articulating clear behavioral standards and emphasizing prevention and early interventions in conflicts.^{6,16}

Peacemaking circles (also known as problem-solving circles, community circles, classroom circles) are some of the most commonly used restorative classroom management practices. For example, any grouping of students and/or teachers sits together in a circle and individuals take turns sharing their thoughts and concerns by passing a talking piece around, speaking only when the talking piece is in their possession.¹⁷ Peacemaking circles are especially popular in elementary schools and have demonstrated positive outcomes in terms of facilitating respectful environments, improving academic achievement, attitudes and behaviors of students,^{18,19} reducing bullying,¹⁶ and assisting in the re-integration of marginalized students.¹⁹

By contrast, restorative intervention practices bring together the victim, offender, and other involved community members to repair harm and restore order after an incident has occurred.¹⁶ Family group conferencing (FGC) is one such practice often used to resolve disciplinary problems without resorting to suspension or expulsion.⁵ In a family group conference, stakeholders meet for a dialogue facilitated by a trained third party mediator.¹⁷ At this meeting the victim may share their story and feelings with the offender and the offender may share more about their circumstances leading up to the incident, accept responsibility for their actions, and make a formal apology.¹⁰ Along with input from teachers, family, and administration, a plan is created to address the needs of the victim and stakeholders and allow the offender

to repair the harm they have caused and mend damaged relationships.¹⁶ According to Bazemore and Umbreit,¹⁰ FGC is perhaps the strongest model for educating offenders about the harm their behavior causes to others.

Program Effectiveness

Although many schools across the country report anecdotal success with restorative justice practices,¹⁷ empirical evaluation data are sparse. Some of the most systematic evaluations of restorative school practices in the U.S. come from Minnesota and Pennsylvania.^{5,17}

In Minnesota, restorative practices have been evaluated primarily in elementary schools in the Twin Cities metro area that choose to use circles as part of daily classroom management and behavioral intervention. Results from these pilot programs indicated that circles contributed to an increase in professional satisfaction among teachers, a significant reduction in behavioral referrals and out-of-school suspensions,^{5,16} and to a lesser extent reductions in in-school suspensions,⁵ students' reports of teasing and bullying, and an increase in student's confidence in resolving their own conflicts.¹⁷

In Pennsylvania, evaluation has generally focused on one particular high school system: The Community Service Foundation Buxmont Schools and Day Treatment Programs. The Buxmont program involves the general use of restorative principles and classroom management strategies to create a "restorative milieu," or whole school climate approach.¹⁵ These broad, holistic programs have shown increasingly positive outcomes: increases in students' pro-social values, positive regard for authority figures, acceptance of responsibility for behavior, perception of school safety, and self-esteem, and a reduction in rates of reoffending,^{12,15} which are all positively related to length of time spent in the programs.¹²

Challenges and Limitations

Across states, challenges to program implementation and success include a lack of administrative buy-in and support from school leadership, time-consuming processes,^{5,16} lack of consistency in implementation and standardized methodologies,^{5,17} and a lack of staff education and training in restorative principles.¹⁶ There is also some evidence that when staff view restorative practices as "just another tool in the toolbox," positive outcomes are limited compared with schools where staff consider restorative practices to be the preferred form of discipline.²⁰ Conclusions drawn from the above evaluations have limitations and are difficult to compare due to the absence of standardized measurement tools, a lack of adequate comparison groups,¹⁷ differing program implementation and methodology, and differing definitions and forms of suspension.¹⁶

Data on circles and other classroom management strategies are indeed sparse, but represent the bulk of information available on restorative practices in schools; hard data on family group conferences in schools are almost non-existent. Preliminary anecdotal and evaluation data from Pennsylvania schools indicate that when implemented consistently, FGC may reduce recidivism, delinquency, referrals for violent offences, bullying, suspension, and expulsion.^{15,17,21} The Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program in Minneapolis public high schools represents a rare opportunity for empirical evaluation of a program that focuses solely on FGC as a restorative intervention strategy and alternative to zero tolerance policies.

II. Program Description: Restorative Justice in Minneapolis Public Schools

Since 2008, Minneapolis Public Schools have been offering restorative justice services to students who are recommended for expulsion due to behavioral incidents, through the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program (RCP) in partnership with the Legal Rights Center. The Legal Rights Center (LRC) is a community-based, non profit law firm that implements a restorative services program, among other services.

The LRC has incorporated restorative justice principles into a model for family group conferencing in the school setting. Specifically, the model is based on the following ideas:

- Families have the ability to build on strengths, address harm, and move towards reconciliation and healing. They are in the best position to determine the course of their own restoration;
- As much as possible, communities and families should come together to solve problems before intervention from the court system becomes necessary;
- Restorative justice brings healing not only to individuals but to their communities as well;
- And, restoring offenders and healing victims is of greater value than punishment and vengeance.²²

Through this partnership, Minneapolis Public Schools and the Legal Rights Center use FGC as an adjunct to punitive school discipline processes, and hope to thereby improve the chances that students will ultimately succeed academically, graduate, and steer away from the risk of violence or criminal behavior.

The Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program

After a disciplinary incident, school administration may refer to the RCP any student who has admitted behavior for which there are grounds for expulsion. The student is provisionally transferred to a new school, and concurrent with the admission process at the new school, the LRC's facilitator will conduct a restorative family conference that includes: a district social worker with additional training in restorative practices, representatives of the receiving and sending school, the student, family or guardians, and anyone else identified as important to helping the student get back on track.

During the conference, all present help the family and student identify their strengths. The incident that led to the recommendation for expulsion is discussed in full, in addition to related issues at school or home. All present are called upon to reflect on the accountability for the incident or, alternatively, for providing support for the student to better succeed at school. After these steps, the LRC facilitator guides the participants through their creation of a detailed accountability plan for successful placement at the new school, and targets that may enable the student to safely return to their original school if they so choose with their good standing restored (after a minimum of 45 days, at a logical break, i.e., after the completion of a quarter or semester of study). That plan often includes referrals to therapeutic or social services. When students are successfully nearing the end of their plan term, a second restorative conference may be convened to plan for re-entry in the school district or to remain indefinitely in the alternative school.

Through this process, MPS and the LRC hope to improve family communication; improve school-family communication; enable students to better understand their need to be accountable for their misbehavior; enable students to retain connection to their schools and to education generally; assess the needs of family and students and identify other community resources that can help either or both; and role model conflict resolution skills for students and families.

III. Program Evaluation

Since the spring of 2009, staff from the Healthy Youth Development Prevention Research Center and the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota (UMN) have carried out an on-going evaluation of the restorative conference program on behalf of the LRC. The purpose of this evaluation is two-fold: to directly assess the on-going process of program implementation, and to collect data on participant outcomes – both aimed at providing feedback to the LRC for program improvement. In early 2009, the evaluation team at UMN began working with the LRC to develop questionnaires and refine processes for gathering data; pre-post surveys were pretested in fall of that year. Survey instruments and protocols (including parent/guardian consent and student assent forms) were revised and implemented beginning in March of 2010.

This interim report focuses on data from student and parent/guardian surveys collected from March, 2010 through June, 2011. It does not yet include analysis of school record data on students, which is currently being collected and analyzed during the summer of 2011.

Goals and Objectives

The immediate goal of the RCP is to ensure that a student who has committed an offense at school, severe enough to warrant expulsion, receives support and motivation to succeed at a new school (to which he or she has been temporarily transferred) through the creation of a restorative family conferencing plan. The broader goals of the RCP are that, at an obvious crisis point for the youth:

- school stability is achieved and motivation is established or reestablished;
- student and family needs are assessed, with resources or referrals made available;
- students, family, and schools can better communicate with and support each other in pursuit of common goals;
- students do not fall behind on their path towards graduation;
- and, protective factors are enhanced and risk factors are reduced for delinquency and violence.

Currently, five specific performance objectives guide the program evaluation and are used to demonstrate success in reaching program goals:

1. Participants will report high levels of satisfaction with the conference process and increased awareness of community supports.
2. Compared to pre-program measured levels, participating students will report increased levels of positive communication with family members, increased levels of connection to school, and

increased levels of problem-solving on follow-up surveys.

3. Compared to pre-program survey data, participating students will report reductions in their levels of problematic behavior at school (e.g., fighting, absences, tardies, etc.).
4. Compared to pre-program data, participating students will exhibit improved student outcomes in terms of school attendance, numbers of classes passed, and fewer behavior referrals at follow-up. PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS DATA FOR THIS OBJECTIVE ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE.
5. Compared to pre-program survey data, participating family members will report increased levels of communication with their children, increased levels of connection to school, and increased awareness of community resources at follow-up.

IV. Evaluation Design and Methods

The study design for this program evaluation has two main components:

- a process evaluation of participant satisfaction and awareness, and
- an outcome assessment consisting of quantitative analysis of pre-post survey data of students and parents/guardians participating in the RCP.

Data collection and surveys. The mode of data collection is a pre-conference survey, administered immediately prior to the first conference and a post-conference follow-up survey, administered approximately 45 days (6 weeks) later. This time frame was defined by Minneapolis Public Schools in accordance with their disciplinary policies. Both the student and one parent/guardian receive a pre- and post-conference survey. The surveys assess behavior, attitudes and perceptions prior to any restorative measures programming and provide baseline levels to compare subsequent follow-up responses from approximately 6 weeks later. The survey was designed specifically for this program by staff from the LRC and the UMN evaluation team. **Appendix A** provides copies of the pre- and post-conference surveys for both students and parents/guardians. Follow-up (post-conference) surveys were mailed to participants' homes or administered over the phone by evaluation staff, depending on study protocol. Figure 1 in **Appendix B** shows the procedures for data collection during follow-up, including when to mail surveys and when to administer them over the phone. As an incentive, participants who completed the post-conference survey received a \$10 gift card from Target.

Response Rates. Of those participants who met all criteria for inclusion (agreed to participate in evaluation, gave demographic information, completed pre-conference surveys, and participated in a family group conference), 60% of students and 71% of parents/guardians completed a post-conference survey. Table 1 shows the number of participants recruited and surveys completed.

Table 1. Number of RCP participants and surveys to date (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

	Invited	Completed pre-surveys	Completed post-surveys	Follow-up Response Rate
Students	51	46	27	0.59
Parents/Guardians	51	49	35	0.71

Data Analysis. The SPSS software package was used to conduct data analyses and statistical procedures. Specifically, analyses included descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means), chi-square and t-tests for attrition analysis, and paired t-tests examining change over time from pre-to post-survey within participants themselves.

V. Results

Descriptive Statistics on Sample

Student Sample Demographic Characteristics. Figure 2 in **Appendix B** shows the flow of student participants from invitation through follow-up, and explains the criteria for inclusion in various parts of the analyses. Forty-nine youth and their parent/guardians consented to participate in the evaluation and provided demographic data. This group of RCP students was approximately two-thirds male (63%), and students were 14.7 years old on average. Most participants were African-American (57%) and preferred to speak English (90%). Table 2a details these findings. All of the students who responded (n=45) reported they felt safe at home, and all but one of the students who responded (n=44) said they felt safe in their neighborhood.

Parent/Guardian Sample Demographic Characteristics. Figure 3 in **Appendix B** shows the flow of parent/guardian participants from invitation through follow-up, and explains the criteria for inclusion in various parts of the analyses. Participating parents/guardians were primarily female (96%) and African-American (49%). Their ages ranged between 23 and 56 years old, with an average age of 39 years. Average family size reported by parents/guardians was about 4 people and most (73%) reported their family income as being below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level. Table 2b details parent characteristics below.

Table 2a. Sample Demographic Characteristics (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Student Characteristics (N=49)					
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Student's Sex			Student's Ethnicity		
Female	18	37	African-American	28	57
Male	31	63	American Indian	8	16
Total	49	100	White	2	4
Student's Age at Time of Pre-Survey			Hispanic	6	12
11	3	6	Multiracial	5	10
12	5	10	Total	49	100
13	5	10	Student's Preferred Language		
14	7	14	Spanish	5	10
15	8	16	English	44	90
16	15	31	Total	49	100
17	6	12			
Total	49	100			
Mean(SD) = 14.65(1.8)					

Table 2b. Sample Demographic Characteristics (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Parent/Family Member Characteristics (N=49)					
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Parent/Guardian's Sex			Family Size		
Female	44	96	1	1	2
Male	2	4	2	7	16
Total	46	100	3	8	18
No response	3		4	7	16
Parent/Guardian's Ethnicity			5	13	30
African-American	17	49	6	4	9
American Indian	7	20	7	3	7
White	6	17	11	1	2
Hispanic	5	14	Total	44	100
Multiracial	0	0	No response	5	
Total	35	100	Mean(SD) = 4.3(1.8)		
No response	14		Family Income Category		
Parent/Guardian's Age at Time of Pre-Survey			Below 125%	32	73
20-29	2	5	Between 125-200%	10	23
30-39	23	61	Above 200%	2	5
40-49	8	21	Total	44	100
50-59	5	13	No response	5	
Total	38	100			
No response	11				
Mean(SD) = 39.1(7.4)					
Age Range = 23 to 56					

Incident Type. Data on the type of behavioral incident resulting in a recommendation for expulsion was available for 46 of the student participants. The majority of students were referred to the program for assault (52%) or a weapon (22%). Table 3 details these findings.

Table 3. Type of Behavioral Incident Resulting in Referral (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Type of Behavioral Incident	<i>n</i>	%
Assault	24	52
Threat/intimidation	1	2
Weapon	10	22
Drugs	3	7
Vandalism	1	2
Harassment	2	4
Disorderly conduct	2	4
Indecent exposure	1	2
Sexual harassment	1	2
Explosive	1	2
Total	46	100
Missing	3	

Attrition Analysis Results. Even though nearly 40% of student participants and 27% of parent/guardian participants were lost at follow-up, attrition analysis showed no significant differences in key demographic characteristics between the 18 students and 13 parents/guardians lost and the 27 students and 35 parents/guardians who completed follow-up surveys. Table 4a and Table 4b show the results of the attrition analysis.

Because of the small sample size, some cell counts in the chi-square analyses were below 5; thus, these data must be interpreted with caution. Even though differences by student race/ethnicity were not significant (Table 4a), it is of note that almost all students identifying as multiracial or Hispanic completed follow-up surveys, and twice as many American Indian students were lost to follow-up as completed follow-up surveys. Also, all students who preferred to speak Spanish completed follow-up surveys.

In the parent/guardian sample (Table 4b), neither of the two males participating completed follow-up surveys. These slight differences highlight a need for data collection staff to be flexible and persistent in tracking down and locating participants to complete follow-up surveys.

Table 4a. Attrition Analysis Results (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Attrition Analysis of Student Sample

Characteristic	Did Not Complete Follow-Up Survey N = 18		Completed Both Surveys N = 27		Test Statistic	p-value
	Mean	(sd)	Mean	(sd)		
Student's Age at Pre-Survey						
Average Age	14.83	(1.62)	14.85	(1.66)	0.04(42)	0.97
	<i>n</i>	<i>col %</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>col %</i>	<i>chi-square (df)</i>	
Student's Sex						
Female	6	33	9	33	0.00(1)	0.63
Male	12	67	18	67		
Student's Ethnicity						
African-American	11	61	15	56	4.11(4)	0.39
American Indian	4	22	2	7		
White	1	6	1	4		
Hispanic	1	6	5	19		
Multiracial	1	6	4	15		
Student's Preferred Language						
Spanish	0	0	5	18	3.75(1)	0.07
English	18	100	22	82		

Table 4b. Attrition Analysis Results (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Attrition Analysis of Parent Sample

Characteristic	Did Not Complete Follow-Up Survey N = 13		Completed Both Surveys N = 35		Test Statistic	p-value
	Mean	(sd)	Mean	(sd)		
Parent/Guardian's Age at Pre-Survey	N = 9		N = 29			
Average Age	40.33	(11.02)	38.76	(6.05)	0.41(9.54)	0.69
Family Size	N = 12		N = 32			
Average Family Size	3.83	(1.90)	4.44	(1.83)	-0.97(42)	0.34
	<i>n</i>	<i>col %</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>col %</i>	<i>chi-square (df)</i>	
Parent/Guardian's Sex	N = 13		N = 33			
Female	11	85	33	100	5.31(1)	0.08
Male	2	15	0	0		
Parent/Guardian's Ethnicity	N = 9		N = 26			
African-American	4	44	13	50	0.34(3)	0.95
American Indian	2	22	5	19		
White	2	22	4	15		
Hispanic	1	11	4	15		
Multiracial	0	0	0	0		
Family Income Category	N = 11		N = 33			
Below 125%	8	73	24	73	0.80(2)	0.67
Between 125-200%	2	18	8	24		
Above 200%	1	9	1	3		

Statistical Analysis by Performance Objective

Performance Objective #1: Participants will report high levels of satisfaction with the conference process and increased awareness of community supports.

Student Results.

On the post-conference survey, participants were asked about their satisfaction with the RCP and awareness of community supports. Overall, students reported high levels of satisfaction and awareness; no less than 89% of students responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with every statement in this category. One hundred percent of student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they and their family members had followed through with their part of the conference plan. Approximately 96% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the conference program to a friend, and 93% agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them be more successful in school. Table 5 provides the questions, responses, and frequencies for student surveys in detail.

Table 5 also includes responses to a “check-all that apply” question (Q25) which asked students to indicate results or consequences of their participation in the conferencing program. Because of their participation in the RCP, 74% of students indicated that they make better decisions and they understand the impact their behavior has on the people around them. Sixty-seven percent of students reported they received more help from adults at school, and 63% said they learned how to solve problems non-violently. Finally, open-ended feedback regarding students’ experiences with the RCP (Q26 & Q27) is also displayed. Students voluntarily wrote comments regarding the most important part of the RCP for them, as well as their ideas about good and bad parts of the program and what was helpful or missing from the program.

Table 5. Student Satisfaction and Awareness of Supports (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Survey Question	n	%
Q17 I would participate in a restorative conference again.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	3	11
2 Agree	18	67
3 Strongly Agree	6	22
Total	27	100
Missing	0	
Q18 I am satisfied with the restorative conference program.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	2	8
2 Agree	17	65
3 Strongly Agree	7	27
Total	26	100
Missing	1	
Q19 The restorative conference program has helped me be more successful at school.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	2	7
2 Agree	15	56
3 Strongly Agree	10	37
Total	27	100
Missing	0	
Q20 I have followed through with my part of the restorative conference plan.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	0	0
2 Agree	21	78
3 Strongly Agree	6	22
Total	27	100
Missing	0	
Q21 My family members have followed through with their part of the conference plans.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	0	0
2 Agree	20	74
3 Strongly Agree	7	26
Total	27	100
Missing	0	

Table 5. Student Satisfaction and Awareness of Supports (March, 2010 – June, 2011) – cont.

Survey Question	n	%
Q22 School staff have followed through with their part of the conference plan.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	3	11
2 Agree	16	59
3 Strongly Agree	8	30
Total	27	100
Missing	0	
Q23 I have used new sources for help because of participating in the restorative conference program.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	3	11
2 Agree	18	67
3 Strongly Agree	6	22
Total	27	100
Missing	0	
Q24 I would recommend the restorative conference program to a friend.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	1	4
2 Agree	18	67
3 Strongly Agree	8	30
Total	27	100
Missing	0	
Q25 Because of my participation in the restorative conference program: (check all that apply)		
I re-entered my school	10	37
I learned how to solve problems non-violently	17	63
I received more help from adults at school	18	67
I was not expelled	13	48
I make better decisions	20	74
I understand the impact my behavior has on the people around me	20	74
I had the chance to share my goals and expectations with the group	13	48
Other reason	5	19
I'm going out of state if I don't get back in school in Mpls.		
I feel more safer.		
I have brought my grades up better than what they was.		
Learned how to stay out of trouble period.		

Table 5. Student Satisfaction and Awareness of Supports (March, 2010 – June, 2011) – cont.

Open-Ended Responses	
Q26 The most important part of the restorative conference program for me was:	
Being able to get back in school	
Getting back in school.	
Getting my grades up.	
Going through with my plans we {discussed} at the meeting.	
I get to go to school.	
I got better grades, I understand the new school better and how to get along better with other students.	
I want to go back to South High	
It helped me resolve my problems.	
It took me out of disturbing environments such as noisy classrooms.	
Knowing I can stay in a good school because of it	
Learn from my mistakes and make better decisions.	
Learning fighting causes bad things to happen in your future	
Learning how to deal with my problems without fighting	
Learning new things and new school	
Not getting expelled	
Sorting things out	
The help I'm getting to become a better person	
The most important part was me having other choices besides being expelled.	
They could help me go back to my other school.	
To be back in school and getting my education.	
To follow through with my expectations	
To get back in school	
To stay focused, and learned how to reach my goals.	
When they told me how I had to act cause I knew I was gone have to change.	
Total	n = 24

Table 5. Student Satisfaction and Awareness of Supports (March, 2010 – June, 2011) – cont.

Q27 Open-Ended Feedback	
Ask people how they feel about their parents! How they like living with theres CUZ I HATE THIS GET ME OUT OF HEAR!!	
Being able to wear regular clothes would have been helpful for me. (A little bit).	
Everything was ok.	
Helpful was the backup plan for school if I couldn't get into my old school.	
I think that there is nothing wrong with this program at all.	
I want to go back to South High	
It'd be better if they gave food.	
It was helpful that I had people at school who I go and talk to about my problems.	
Me being transferred was a lot of help to me. Thank you!	
No comment. It was really helpful though.	
No, yall gave me good information and make me make good decision.	
That since the school is so small everybody gets in trouble when something is missing	
That they talked me in to doing better. I love that program cause if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be where I am today.	
They didn't really tell me exactly what to do. It was more like, "do good, don't get in trouble."	
This program has helped me and my mom communicate better and understand each other, the program has been great!!	
Tutoring was helpful for me to keep up with regular class.	
Very Helpful	
Total	n = 17

Parent/Guardian Results.

Table 6 provides the questions, responses, and frequencies for parent/guardian surveys in detail. Specifically, family members were asked about reasons for deciding to participate on the pre-conference survey, as well as results/consequences of participating on the post-conference survey. Answers to these “check all that apply” questions can be seen in Table 6. The majority of family members (86%) decided to participate in the program because they wanted their child to learn ways to avoid getting into trouble. Because of their participation in the RCP, 69% of parents/guardians said their child learned ways to avoid getting into trouble and has more support from adults at school, and 63% reported that they have more support from adults at their child's school.

Parents/guardians also reported high levels of satisfaction with the program; no fewer than 91% of parents responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with every statement about satisfaction. One hundred percent of respondents said they were satisfied with the program and felt they had followed through with their part of the conference plan. About 68% of parents reported using new sources for help after participation in the program.

Finally, open-ended feedback regarding family members’ experiences with the RCP (Q27) is also displayed. Parents/guardians voluntarily wrote comments regarding their ideas about good and bad parts of the program and what was helpful or missing from the program.

Table 6. Parent/Guardian Satisfaction & Awareness of Supports (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Survey Question	n	%
Q1Pre I decided to participate in this conference because: (check all that apply)		
I want my child to re-enter her/his school.	24	69
I want my child to learn ways to avoid getting into trouble.	30	86
I heard it was a good thing to do.	8	23
I was told I had to.	0	0
I want my child to have more support from adults at school.	19	54
I want more support from adults at my child's school.	11	31
I do not want my child to be expelled.	8	38
Other reason	7	20
Because I don't want it to be on her record so I did what I believe is best.		
I want my child to have a better chance at being successful. I want my child to learn how to manage his anger. I don't want my child to end up in prison nor part of the system.		
I want my child to understand that when making foolish & wrong decisions it has a "negative outcome".		
I want my grandchild to succeed in school.		
I want my son to know that he has support and direction from his school and know that this conference will be beneficial to his future.		
More education		
So he doesn't fall behind in academics (or socially).		
Q1Post Because of participation in the restorative conference program: (check all that apply)		
My child re-entered his/her school.	12	34
My child learned ways to avoid getting into trouble.	24	69
My child has more support from adults at school.	24	69
I have more support from adults at my child's school.	22	63
My child was not expelled.	20	57
I had the chance to share my goals and expectations with the group.		
Other reason	7	20
Daughter now attends [alt school] because she preferred it over previous school		
Daughter stayed at [alt school] again this year because she preferred it.		
I'm ok, [sons name] has really changed his ways, and the way about doing things.		
My son has been able to get caught up on his academics and is able to participate in school activities.		
Opportunity to talk about issues at school, & mom. He is more open to talk about problems at school! I usually call to find out about my son!		
She has not changed at all.		
Talking more.		
Was able to enter school period! Thanks!		

Table 6. Parent/Guardian Satisfaction & Awareness of Supports (March, 2010 – June, 2011) – cont.

Survey Question	n	%
Q10 I would participate in a restorative conference again.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	1	3
2 Agree	16	46
3 Strongly Agree	18	51
Total	35	100
Q11 I am satisfied with the restorative conference program.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	1	3
2 Agree	21	60
3 Strongly Agree	13	37
Total	35	100
Missing	1	
Q12 I have followed through with my part of the restorative conference plan.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	0	0
2 Agree	19	54
3 Strongly Agree	16	46
Total	35	100
Q13 My child has followed through with his/her part of the conference plan.		
0 Strongly Disagree	2	6
1 Disagree	1	3
2 Agree	20	59
3 Strongly Agree	11	32
Total	34	100
Missing	1	
Q14 School staff have followed through with their part of the conference plan.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	1	3
2 Agree	23	66
3 Strongly Agree	11	31
Total	35	100
Q15 I have used new sources for help because of participating in the restorative conference program.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	11	32
2 Agree	17	50
3 Strongly Agree	6	18
Total	34	100
Missing	1	

Table 6. Parent/Guardian Satisfaction & Awareness of Supports (March, 2010 – June, 2011) – cont.

Q16 I would recommend the restorative conference program to a friend.		
0 Strongly Disagree	0	0
1 Disagree	2	6
2 Agree	16	47
3 Strongly Agree	16	47
Total	34	100
Missing	1	

Q27 Open-Ended Feedback	
Everything about it was positive. She is a better person - her attitude about life now is better after participating in this.	
Everything was helpful, thank you!	
For the most part, I am very satisfied with the program. It has helped my son. His grades have improved and so has his attitude. Keep up the good work.	
Thank you for having programs that keep kids studying and not quitting school.	
Great program, wish my daughter would have kept her part in it :(
He's not going to get in trouble, he'd try harder and the teachers would help him.	
Helped my daughter focus on her future and become more open to working with school staff	
Helpful that they were genuinely concerned with son's well-being. Easy to talk to and easy to contact.	
I am so appreciative to have someone outside of my family that cares enough and support my son and I through this time of need. I am really thankful and feels secure that with this program my son will succeed.	
I believe the program in general is good, but the schools (alternative) are not.	
I think program is really good, as long as student follows through (my daughter didn't)	
It helped her to concentrate more on her studies, to get better grades. She hasn't gotten into any more trouble.	
It was great. Everyone was really helpful and went smoothly, helpful in trying to fix a mix-up. We're grateful to have been a part of it.	
It would be helpful if [alt school] had math for younger people such as 8-9th grade level. My son in 9th grade is struggling with 11th & 12 grade level, and is discouraged. We are encouraging him to get [tutoring].	
She distanced herself from problems and that benefitted her.	
Thanks a lot! After the expulsion, wasn't sure what [student] was going to do. *Q6- Haven't been any [functions] except enrollment. *Q9 not enough [resources] but some	
the family and youth Restorative Conference Program have help me and my son to talk about problems that may be happening at school. talk to the right person & get help or direction to do what is right.	
There is no bad part about the program, this program has been very helpful to me and as well as my son. Good thing was he has turned his life and his ways around, we are communicating with one another	
Very Helpful	
Yes it was helpful to me and my child. It wasn't no bad parts.	
You could have explained the process a little more, and you should pay attention to what's going on in the childs life, the underlying causes of his behavior, school staff should make more of an effort.	
Total	n=22

Performance Objective #2: Compared to pre-program measured levels, participants will report increased levels of positive communication with family members, increased levels of connection to school, and increased levels of problem-solving on follow-up surveys.

Change in responses from pre- to post-survey was assessed using paired t-tests. We have chosen to bold any probability level (p-value) < 0.10 as a statistically significant change from baseline, due to small sample size. Detailed student results for Performance Objective #2 are shown in Table 7. See **Appendix C** for a complete table of student pre and post survey response frequencies to all questions.

Family Communication: Changes in mean responses to student survey questions about communicating with parents about how things were going at school (Q14) and problems with friends or someone they are dating (Q16) suggest a positive trend toward more frequent communication at follow-up, although these changes are not statistically significant. Students reported talking slightly less often with family members at follow-up regarding ways to resolve a conflict (Q15), although this change was not statistically significant.

School Connection: Results showed a slight, significant increase in how often students reported that if they need help at school, they know someone they could ask(Q2); from pre-to post-survey, the mean response score increased from 2.15 to 2.37 (p=.08). Positive changes in levels of agreement that adults at school expect them to do well were also noted. Other questions measuring connection to school suggest small positive changes from pre to post survey, although not statistically significant.

Problem-Solving: Student responses to survey question #10 showed a significant increase in agreement with the statement that they make good choices about how to act even when they are upset; the mean response score increased from 1.56 to 1.89 (p=.03). Student reports of knowing an adult they can talk to outside of school to help them with a problem (Q7) remained essentially unchanged over time.

Table 7. Student Differences from Pre to Post-Survey in Family Communication, School Connection, and Problem-Solving (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Survey Question	Pre-Conference Survey N=27		Post-Conference Survey N=27		Paired T-Tests for Significance		
	Mean*	sd	Mean*	sd	diff	t (df = 26)	p-value
<i>Family Communication</i>							
Q14 In the past month, how often have you talked to family about how things are going at school? ^a	1.85	1.03	2.04	0.65	0.19	1.10	0.28
Q15 In the past month, how often have you talked to family about ways to resolve a conflict? ^a	1.89	0.85	1.59	1.05	-0.30	-1.28	0.21
Q16 In the past month, how often have you talked to family about problems with your friends or someone you are dating? ^a	1.30	0.91	1.67	1.21	0.37	1.59	0.13
<i>School Connection</i>							
Q1 I like school. ^b	2.19	0.62	2.26	0.71	0.07	0.57	0.57
Q2 If I need help at school, I know someone I could ask. ^b	2.15	0.53	2.37	0.57	0.22	1.80	0.08
Q3 Adults at school care about students. ^b	2.15	0.53	2.19	0.68	0.04	0.25	0.80
Q4 Adults at school expect me to do well. ^b	2.44	0.58	2.59	0.50	0.15	1.07	0.29
Q6 I feel safe at school. ^b	2.15	0.61	2.31	0.79	0.15	0.78	0.44
<i>Problem-solving</i>							
Q7 If I need help with a problem, I know an adult I can talk to outside of school. ^b	2.56	0.58	2.52	0.85	-0.04	-0.27	0.79
Q10 I make good choices about how to act, even when I'm upset. ^b	1.56	0.58	1.89	0.80	0.33	2.36	0.03

Notes:

a. Responses included 0 "Not at all," 1 "A little," 2 "Some," and 3 "A lot"; thus, scores ranged from 0 – 3.

b. Responses included 0 "NO!," 1 "no," 2 "yes," 3 "YES!"; thus, scores ranged from 0 – 3.

diff = difference in mean scores; df = degrees of freedom

Performance Objective #3. Compared to pre-program survey data, participating students will report reductions in their levels of problematic behavior at school (e.g., fighting, absences, tardies, etc.).

Change in average responses from pre- to post-survey was assessed using paired t-tests and significant probability levels are bolded in Table 8. Results showed a significant decrease in how often students reported getting into a physical fight (Q12); mean response scores dropped from .69 to .35 (p=.05). Reports of skipping or cutting school (Q11) also showed change in the hypothesized direction, although not significant. It is interesting to note that agreement with the statement (Q5), “In school, it is hard for me to stay out of trouble,” actually increased significantly over time, from 0.77 to 1.15 (p = 0.03). It appears that students realize that their actions are under scrutiny by school staff during this crucial time. Finally, reports of taking part in a fight with friends at the follow-up survey remained essentially flat or increased slightly, but were not significantly different from pre-survey reports.

Table 8. Student Differences from Pre to Post-Survey in Reports of Problematic Behavior (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Survey Question	Pre-Conference Survey N=27		Post-Conference Survey N=27		Paired T-Tests for Significance		
	Mean*	sd	Mean*	sd	diff	t (df)	P-value
Q5 In school, it is hard for me to stay out of trouble. ^a	0.77	0.71	1.15	0.78	0.39	2.30(25)	0.03
Q11 In the past month how often did you skip or cut school (a whole day or a class)? ^b	0.56	0.89	0.41	0.57	-0.15	-1.00(26)	0.33
Q12 In the past month how often did you get into a physical fight? ^b	0.69	0.68	0.35	0.63	-0.35	-2.09(25)	0.05
Q13 In the past month how often did you take part in a fight where a group of your friends was against another group? ^b	0.15	0.46	0.22	0.58	0.07	0.70(26)	0.49

Notes:

a. Responses included 0 “NO!,” 1 “no,” 2 “yes,” 3 “YES!”; thus, scores ranged from 0 – 3.

b. Responses included 0 “Never,” 1 “1 or 2 times,” 2 “3 or 4 times,” 3 “5 or more times”; thus, scores ranged from 0 – 3.

diff = difference in mean scores; df = degrees of freedom

Performance Objective #4: Compared to pre-program data, participating students will exhibit improved student outcomes in terms of school attendance, numbers of classes passed, and fewer behavior referrals at follow-up.

Data not yet available at the time of this interim report. We are currently waiting for Minneapolis Public Schools to pull the data from school records for analysis purposes.

Performance Objective #5. Compared to pre-program survey data, participating family members will report increased levels of communication with their children, increased levels of connection to school, and increased awareness of community resources at follow-up.

Detailed parent/guardian results for Performance Objective #5 are shown in Table 9. Change in average responses from pre- to post-survey was assessed using paired t-tests and significant probability levels < 0.10 are bolded. See **Appendix C** for a complete list of parent/guardian pre- and post-survey response frequencies to all questions.

Family Communication: Changes in mean responses to parent/guardian survey questions about communicating with their child about how things were going at school (Q2) and problems with friends or someone they are dating (Q4) suggest a positive trend toward more frequent communication at follow-up, although these changes are not statistically significant. Parents/guardians reported talking significantly less often with their child at follow-up regarding ways to resolve a conflict (Q3), mean scores decreased from 2.76 to 2.50 (0.08). Coupled with a similar result on the student survey, this finding may not actually be surprising. Instead it likely indicates that this particular question needs revision. If there was less conflict during the past month at follow-up for students (due to being transferred to a different school for example), both parents and students would obviously report talking less than at the pre-conference survey. Thus, this result could be interpreted to mean that fewer parents needed to talk about ways to solve a conflict with their child.

School Connection: Results showed a positive, significant increase in how much parents/guardians agreed that they know someone at their child's school they could talk to about a problem (Q8); from pre- to post-survey, the mean response score increased from 1.91 to 2.50 ($p=.01$). There was also a significant, positive change in levels of agreement that their child is safe at school (Q7: mean scores increased from 1.82 to 2.24, $p = 0.04$). Parents/guardians also reported a positive trend of talking more often to their child's teachers at follow-up (Q5). No significant difference in reports of how often parents/guardians attend functions at school (Q6) were noted between pre-conference and follow-up surveys.

Community Resources: Parents/guardians demonstrated significant increases in agreement levels with the statement that there are resources or organizations in their community that can help them support their child to do better at school ; mean response score increased from 1.71 to 2.03 ($p=.06$).

Table 9. Parent/Guardian Differences from Pre to Post-Survey in Family Communication, School Connection, and Awareness of Community Resources (March, 2010 – June, 2011).

Survey Question	Pre-Conference Survey N=35		Post-Conference Survey N=35		Paired T-Tests for Significance		
	Mean*	sd	Mean*	sd	diff	t (df)	p-value
<i>Family Communication</i>							
Q2 Past month how often have you talked to child about how things are going at school? ^a	2.48	0.84	2.73	0.57	0.25	1.49(32)	0.15
Q3 Past month, how often have you talked to child about ways to resolve a conflict? ^a	2.76	0.43	2.50	0.79	-0.27	-1.79(33)	0.08
Q4 Past month, how often have you talked with your child about problems with their friends or someone they are dating? ^a	2.11	1.11	2.17	1.10	0.06	0.21(34)	0.83
<i>School Connection</i>							
Q5 How often do you talk with your child's teachers? ^b	2.18	1.04	2.48	0.62	0.30	1.58(32)	0.14
Q6 How often do you attend functions at school? ^b	1.91	1.03	1.69	0.19	-0.22	-0.94(31)	0.35
Q7 I feel my child is safe at school. ^c	1.82	0.92	2.24	0.71	0.42	2.18(32)	0.04
Q8 When I have concerns about a problem at my child's school, I know someone I could ask. ^c	1.91	0.97	2.50	0.66	0.59	2.84(33)	0.01
<i>Community Resources</i>							
Q9 There are resources or organizations in my community that can help me support my child to do better at school. ^c	1.71	0.94	2.03	0.63	0.32	1.93(33)	0.06

Notes:

a. Responses included 0 "Not at all," 1 "A little," 2 "Some," and 3 "A lot"; thus, scores ranged from 0 – 3.

b. Responses included 0 "Never," 1 "Hardly ever," 2 "Sometime," 3 "Often," and 4 "Very often"; thus, scores range from 0 – 4.

c. Responses included 0 "Strongly Disagree," 1 "Disagree," 2 "Agree," and 3 "Strongly Agree"; thus, scores range from 0 – 3.

diff = difference in mean scores; df = degrees of freedom

VI. Anecdotal Process Results from Interviews with MPS staff

When questioned by evaluation staff, administration from Minneapolis Public Schools reported that they find the RCP to be a positive experience, for students, families, and the schools themselves. According to MPS administrators, students benefit from getting a fresh start and having an opportunity to make amends as well as the opportunity to witness and learn alternative conflict resolution skills. One administrator offered this opinion on the value of the RCP:

“For many of our students saying things like ‘I’m sorry’ is sign of weakness. And we know as adults in a functioning society and in our relationships that it’s one of the most vital things to getting through. And not having a life full of confrontation and struggle, it starts with losing the need to be defiant all the time, and to always stand up against everything. You can make yourself so busy fighting the system that you end up really just not being able to function in a community. And so I think for a lot of our students the real value is understanding that there is actual harm to the community from our individual actions, and that just simply being cognizant of that and able to say ‘I did something bad, now I need to do something good’ is a vital skill that all of our community needs, not just the students but the parents and friends and other family members and their role models. Many of our students just don’t see that type of thing being role-modeled – people apologizing for their behavior in an authentic way.”

Administrators also discussed benefits to parents such as feeling of relief when their child has a chance to start over, and benefits to the school such as flexibility in responding to behavioral incidents. MPS administrators discussed how the RCP facilitates clear communication between all parties regarding students’ situations, helps staff and administrators support each other, and gives staff and administrators a deeper understanding of the student’s situation. Finally, administrators felt that having a neutral third party from an outside agency (in this case, staff from the LRC) as conference facilitator helps represent the interests of both the student and family member and ensures fairness.

VII. Discussion

This technical report summarizes the interim results of a pilot evaluation of the Restorative Conference Program. High levels of participant satisfaction and increased awareness of community supports, in addition to positive open-ended responses, suggest that there is excellent potential for increased participant enrollment, should the resources become available.

Overall, it appears that student and parent/guardian participation in the RCP is a positive experience. In addition to the significant increase in students reporting that they make good choices about how to act even when they are upset, we also noted some positive trends in terms of student behavioral outcomes including slight increases in positive feelings about school and adults at school, feeling safer at school, and increases in talking to family members about school and people they are dating. Results also showed encouraging trends in student behavioral changes including a significant reduction in fighting and a slight reduction in cutting classes or skipping school. In addition to feeling their child is safer at school and increases in parent/guardian reports that they know someone they could ask if they have concerns about a problem at their child’s school, results indicate positive trends in how often parents/guardians talk to their children about school and friends or someone they are dating, how often they talk with their child’s teachers, and their awareness of community supports.

There are a number of limitations to note when interpreting these data that preclude drawing conclusions about the program's ability to affect change over time from pre-survey to post-survey. First, the lack of a comparison group in this one-group pre-and post-test study design somewhat limits our ability to attribute participant changes in outcomes to the program. Second, findings at this early stage rely upon self-report data from students and family members; analysis of school record data will provide an objective measure of student outcomes. Third, the number of participants in both the student and parent follow-up samples (N=27 and N=35) are small; significant differences in the student and parent group are difficult to detect due to lack of statistical power. In addition to the small sample size, some of the mixed results and lack of significant changes within may be explained in part by the dynamic development stage of adolescence.

At this early stage, the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program demonstrates promising potential for affecting positive changes in behavior, attitudes, and opinions for both students and family members who participate.

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