

WHAT IMPACT DO ALTERNATE DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES HAVE ON SCHOOL  
CLIMATE AND STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN A K-5 TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

Nicole Pearlene Dickens-Simon

Rider University

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Sharon Sherman, Ed.D., Chair Dissertation Committee

Leonard Goduto, Ed.D., Dissertation Committee Member

Scott Rocco, Ed.D., Dissertation Committee Member

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This work was created to acknowledge the significance of a positive school climate in a K–5 Title I elementary school and to recognize the impact alternate disciplinary techniques have had on school climate and student behavior. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Rider University in enabling me to access source material for research. By presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the advanced degree from Rider University, I agree that the library of Rider University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to quote, to copy from, or to publish this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, by the Rider University College of Education and the Office of Graduate and Continuing Studies, or by me. Such quoting, copying, or publishing must be solely for scholarly purposes and will not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying or publication of this dissertation that involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without my written permission.

## **ABSTRACT**

The New Jersey Department of Education reported that more than 50,000 students were suspended from school in 2017–2018. Over 17,000 students were suspended more than once that school year. As public school districts create their code of conduct, many are focused on maintaining a safe, distraction-free school environment with the primary use of student removal from the classroom—but at whose expense and to whose benefit? Positive approaches to school climate and student behavior have been presented to address concerns within public schools by the NJ Department of Education. The goal of this action research was to determine the relationship between the joint implementation of Responsive Classroom and restorative practices on school climate and student behavior from the perspectives of students and staff. Restorative practices and Responsive Classroom were selected because they support student knowledge of social and emotional competencies that extend beyond the classroom. The school that was the focus of this study was experiencing discipline problems associated with student behavior, lack of school wide consistency, and overall school climate issues. A quantitative correlational research design was utilized for this study to examine the impact on these two alternate disciplinary techniques on school climate and student behavior within a K–5 Title I elementary school. Findings from this study did not indicate a correlation between the use of these strategies and an improved school climate and student behavior.

*Keywords:* student behavior, school climate, Responsive Classroom, restorative practices, Title I

## **DEDICATION**

To God be the glory. It is only through Him that I stand in health able to achieve this lifetime goal. Praise Him! I dedicate this dissertation to my family. I am proud to receive this title under the watchful eyes and daily guidance of my mother, Dr. Alice M. Dickens, the first woman in the family to earn a college degree and only sibling to earn an advanced degree. She is a blessing in my life and that of my three children.

To Savion, who pulled me back together upon earning a B+ on a research paper (I didn't think there was enough duct tape in the world!). God has gifted me with a brilliant, insightful, and generous son, wise beyond his years. I prayed him into existence and am so very thankful to have been given the opportunity to see him grow. I thank my daughters, my two chocolate chips that bring me warm hugs, daily new life experiences, and abounding joy. To Serenity, my gentle butterfly. Thank you for always encouraging me when I packed my school bag early in the morning, not to return until well after dark. Your inspirational notes, understanding of why my eyes never remained open through our Friday family movie nights, and reminders to bring my work to your dance rehearsals and competitions kept me on track. Thank you, Beans. To my Grace, Jr., the voice of reason and understanding. Thank you for supporting my absence from home, accepting my constant attachment to the computer, and calling me Dr. in the midst of studying for a challenging course assessment. While I know that neither of you minded eating Panera, Salad Works, and Starbucks weekly while I worked on this, I also know that you'll be happy with an actual family dinner. Thank you, James, for the ongoing encouragement and steadfast support of my academic and professional goals.

The final dedication is to my Aunt Florence L. Moss, who always wanted me to get straight A's as an undergrad (yikes!) . . . better late than never, Aunt Florence. I finally did it! I hope that you're looking down at my transcript with a smile. It's for you!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This doctoral work would not have been successful without the continuous support of the faculty and staff of the Rider University College of Education and the Office of Graduate and Continuing Studies. Thank you, Dr. Leonard Goduto, for your exuberance toward the Rider Ed.D. Program, Cohort I community building activities, exemplars of success, and unwavering encouragement throughout each course. You have created a wonderful academic experience for the life-long learners who chose Rider University to complete this journey.

Dr. Sharon Sherman, you are nothing less than an angel, and I thank you for serving as my Dissertation Chair. Amidst the stress of daunting tasks and deadlines, you remained fully optimistic and kind. Thank you for being a resource and an advocate. Dr. Scott Rocco, you have been a light to guide not only this doctoral work, but my professional self. Assuming the role of principal in the same month as I began Rider Ed.D. coursework did not seem ideal, but with your reassurance and steadfast belief in my success, I now stand fully committed to my K–5 Title I school community with a new title. Thank you for believing, Dr. Rocco.

Much love is given to Cohort I, the Rider Ed.D. pioneers! Our paths will invariably carry us far away from the friendships that we have created throughout this process, but our memories run deep and shall not be forgotten.

Where are the words to express the gratitude I have for my mentor, Mrs. Katherine Taylor Clark, who has been by my side since 2002 in the Rider University Master's Program? The grace of her smile, the joy within her heart, and the sincerity of her intent. The wisdom within her silence, as well as her words—phenomenal woman is she and a blessing to me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>AUTHOR’S NOTE .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Problem Statement .....	14
Purpose of Study .....	22
Problems of Practice .....	28
Rationale and Significance .....	29
Definitions .....	31
<b>CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Significance of Study.....	36
School Climate.....	42
Effects of a Positive School Climate.....	43
Impact of a Negative School Climate .....	45
Restorative Practices.....	46
Effects of Restorative Practices .....	49
Responsive Classroom.....	52
Effects of Responsive Classroom .....	52
<b>CHAPTER 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>54</b>
Introduction.....	54

Participants in Action Research .....	60
Design for Action.....	62
Overview of Methodology .....	63
Research Setting .....	64
Questions and Hypothesis .....	66
Hypotheses.....	66
Null Hypothesis .....	67
Alternate (Research) Hypothesis .....	67
Dependent Variables.....	67
Independent Variables .....	67
<b>CHAPTER 4: Description of Findings.....</b>	<b>68</b>
Introduction.....	68
Limitations and Delimitations.....	70
Characteristics.....	71
Research Question 1 .....	73
Research Question 2 .....	80
Summary .....	83
Summary of Results.....	86
Chapter Summary .....	89
<b>CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>93</b>
Introduction.....	93
Purpose of Study .....	94



Research Questions.....	97
Summary of the Findings.....	98
Central Question Discussion.....	99
Limitations.....	102
Recommendations for Future Study .....	103
Implications .....	105
Recommendations for Practice .....	107
Questions to Consider.....	110
<b>USEFUL READINGS.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS.....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: New Jersey Department of Education Definitions .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Additional Sources .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: New Jersey School Climate Survey Domains .....</b>	<b>128</b>

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

- Table 1.** Restorative Practices/Responsive Classroom Jointly Implemented
- Table 2.** Restorative Practices/Responsive Classroom
- Table 3.** The 11 Essential Elements of Restorative Practices Intervention
- Table 4.** Hampstead Hill Academy Pre-K–8 Out-of-School Suspensions and Office Referrals, 2009–2014
- Table 5.** 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 Z Schoolwide Goals
- Table 6.** 2017–2019 Responsive Classroom/Restorative Practices
- Table 7.** Research Questions
- Table 8.** School Z Enrollment by Racial and Ethnic Group
- Table 9.** School Z Out-of-School Suspensions
- Table 10.** School Z Teachers
- Table 11.** School Z Analysis by Character.Org
- Table 12.** School Z Statistical Analysis: *t* Test: Paired 2 Sample for Means
- Table 13.** Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Student Question 1
- Table 14.** Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Staff Question 2
- Table 15.** Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Student Question 14
- Table 16.** School Z Out-of-School Suspension Data Chart
- Table 17.** Chi Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Staff Question 10
- Table 18.** Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Student Question 33
- Table 19.** NJ School Climate Student Survey: Three Student Questions
- Table 20.** Average Daily Attendance, School Z
- Table 21.** NJ School Climate Student Survey: School Climate Questions

**Table 22.** NJ School Climate Staff Survey Question: I Feel Safe Inside My School

**Figure 1.** Hampstead Hill Academy Pre-K–8 Out-of-School Suspensions and Office Referrals, 2009–2014

**Figure 2.** Character.Org 2018 vs. 2019 School Z Analysis

**Figure 3.** NJ School Climate Staff Survey Question: I Feel Safe Inside My School

**Supplemental Table 1.** School Z Enrollment by Student Group

**Supplemental Table 2.** 2016–2017 National Suspension Rate by Race and Sex

**Supplemental Table 3.** 2016–2017 Researched School District Violence and Vandalism

**Supplemental Table 4.** 2018–2019 School Z Demographics

**Supplemental Table 5.** School Z Enrollment by Grade Over 3 School Years

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

We have to be unafraid of assessing the climate of our schools. School climate assessment should be as much a priority as academic assessment (Elias, 2013). A true learning community is the creation of a school where educators, students, and academic programs are aligned with learning, assessment, and continuous improvement (Williams et al., 2012). In 2006, the New Jersey Department of Education released best practices guidelines that focused on student behavior and school environment. The guidelines defined a safe school environment as providing a place for open discussion where diversity and differences are respected, communication between adults and students is encouraged and supported, and conflict is constructively managed and mediated (School Safety and Security Manual: Best Practices Guidelines, 2006). Similar needs of our students persist today.

Elementary schools bear the great societal responsibility of nurturing young children, keeping them safe, creating lifelong learners, presenting data to demonstrate academic growth, encouraging friendships and kindness, and fully partnering and collaborating with parents and families. The magnitude of these requirements, compounded by the prospect of a school's potential failure to fully develop each student, would necessitate that a school implement a structured organizational protocol instead of utilizing inconsistent methods to engage and nurture its students. An improved organizational structure includes an emphasis on the individuals who fill roles within the school, not just job titles and descriptions.

The conceptual framework within this study was guided by the social discipline window of the International Institute of Restorative Practices. This conceptual framework illustrates the need to be restorative and take action with others, as opposed to for others, to others, or not at all.

The major concepts studied within this research were school climate and student behavior. The independent variable within this study was the joint implementation of Responsive Classroom and restorative practices. The presumed relationship between school climate and student behavior was that in an improved, positive school climate, student behavior will also improve and be positive. Responsive Classroom and restorative practices were identified for this study as a result of the researcher's analysis of discipline data from school districts such as Syracuse, Pittsburg, Baltimore, Denver, and Atlantic City.

A school leader should take a personal interest in the strengths and interests of teachers and school staff to improve faculty morale and school climate. According to Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey (2018):

The most successful schools are intentionally organized, with policies and structures in place to facilitate all areas of student learning, thereby empowering educators with the flexibility, support, and opportunities to implement practices and strategies that are tailored to the unique needs of students. (p. 25)

Without a positive, celebratory school climate, schoolwide academic and behavioral success will remain at bay (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning, which are necessary for a productive and satisfying life within a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe (National Climate Center, 2019). Policies and practices assist schools as they strive to create a positive climate. Students can only learn if they feel safe; therefore, implementing effective discipline practices is a benefit to the schoolwide population.

## **Problem Statement**

In April 2019, the United States Department of Education released a parent and educator guide on school climate. The Department's National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments describes school climate in this way:

School climate reflects how members of the school community experience the school, including interpersonal relationships, teacher and other staff practices, and organizational arrangements. School climate includes factors that serve as conditions for learning and that support physical and emotional safety, connection and support, and engagement. (US Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2016, para. 15)

The establishment of this federal commission on school safety is a result of the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Douglas Stoneman High School in Parkland, Florida. The purpose of this national resource guide is to provide meaningful and actionable recommendations to keep students safe at school. These resources seek to support the modification of student behavior and the attainment of a consistently positive school climate.

In defining what a positive school climate is within the United States, Betsy DeVos, the US Secretary of Education, has identified the school's need to support the social, emotional, and academic needs of its students. In 2016, the US Department of Education's National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments describes a positive school climate in the following manner:

A positive school climate reflects attention to fostering social and physical safety, providing support that enables students and staff to realize high behavioral and academic standards as well as encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring

relationships throughout the school community. (US Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2016, para. 18)

Research shows that when schools and districts focus on improving school climate, students are more likely to be engaged, to develop positive relationships with each other and adults, and to demonstrate positive behaviors (American Institutes for Research/US Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2017).

Because a student discipline policy undoubtedly affects how members of the school community experience the school, it influences school climate (Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources, 2019). While there is no federal mandate for public schools to modify their student disciplinary policy, it is noted within the guide that many districts are choosing to update their policy in support of an improved school climate. This federal guide suggests the use of data and stakeholder involvement to initiate school climate improvements.

When our children walk into the school, the most fundamental thing they want is to have a relationship with a caring adult who will listen to them. They need those relationships; they are the gateway to learning (Elias, 2013). At their January 2013 Safe Schools Forum, the New Jersey School Boards Association released a report stating:

The more positive the school ranked in five measures of a healthy school climate—overall climate; meaningful student involvement; teacher approval; student pride; and support and care by and among school staff—the lower the incidence of violence. (Elias, 2013)

Social and emotional learning is important to enable individuals to learn to understand and manage their emotions and relationships, and to make good decisions (US Department of Education, 2013). In small group discussion with students, it became apparent that the children

lacked the vocabulary required to accurately express their feelings. At times, this inability to communicate verbally resulted in a physical response. In continuing to implement the district code of conduct with fidelity, additional strategies were sought to support a proactive approach to discipline. As a result of PTA, faculty, student advisory committee, district, and School Z Title I meeting contributions, restorative practices and Responsive Classroom rose to the top of the list of resources.

This researcher analyzed the suspension rate and climate surveys of School Z, in addition to conducting interviews with stakeholders, staff, and students to create a building needs assessment. While other behavioral intervention techniques were discussed and explored, ultimately, the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom were selected because the strategies and resources within appeared to be able to address the social-emotional needs of the building within the classroom and schoolwide. School-based research has demonstrated that when students feel stronger bonds and levels of connection with those around them, they are less likely to misbehave and harm others (US Department of Education, 2014). Social-emotional learning can help individuals stop and think before they react, control their response to stress, develop supportive and caring relationships, persist through challenges, seek help, and pay attention to theirs and others' needs and feelings (US Department of Education, 2013).

This research is incredibly important to our young learners because school and learning should be enjoyable. As educators teach, they seek to create lifelong learners and contributing members of society. Evidence has demonstrated that the highly punitive and authoritarian zero-tolerance policies of the 1990s and early 2000s failed to change student behavior or make schools safer. Environments marked by fear, retribution, and intensive sanctioning actually



eroded feelings of safety and belonging (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

The researcher selected improvement research because she sought to directly impact students and their academic experience. The researcher wanted to measure student behavior and school climate to determine whether a positive school climate and clearly defined set of rules impacted student behavior. According to Bailie (2016):

Restorative practices serve an important dual function in the life of a community, school, family, or workplace. The practices offer mechanisms to increase social bonding and proactively strengthen community, while also offering clear methods to repair relational harm in the wake of harm or wrongdoing. Techniques such as circles and restorative conferencing may take a myriad of forms in different social contexts. (p. 10)

As the researcher conducted a building assessment of School Z, various strategies were considered to effect change. Responsive Classroom was district initiated as a classroom resource. The goal became to jointly implement restorative practices and Responsive Classroom, because together, these strategies support the entire building (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.**

*Restorative Practices/Responsive Classroom Jointly Implemented*

<b>Restorative Practices Essential Strategies</b>	<b>Responsive Classroom Essential Strategies</b>	<b>Jointly Implemented</b>
Restorative circles	Morning meetings	Building a classroom and school community; Giving students a voice in the classroom and schoolwide; Teaching expressive language and ownership
Restorative conferences	Closing circles	Self-reflection, respectful discourse, and student reflection on classroom and schoolwide issues; giving praise, providing support, and questioning in a classroom or whole school setting
Accountability	Establishing rules	Embracing personal responsibility and responsibility
Giving students a voice	Energizers	Teaching behaviors and expectations, not programs
Reflection sheets	Quiet time	Assuming responsibility for self, classroom, school community

The five domains within restorative practices promote better learning. The four domains of Responsive Classroom promote better teaching. Together, the strategies provide a strong foundation for an academic setting such as a K–5 Title I elementary school. For this reason, the researcher jointly implemented restorative practices and Responsive Classroom (**Table 2**). The purpose of this action research was to improve the school experience of the students. These two alternate disciplinary practices were being jointly implemented to support students in the classroom and schoolwide. Together, restorative practices and Responsive Classroom presented one cohesive strategy to address school climate and student behavior.

**Table 2.**

*Restorative Practices/Responsive Classroom*

<b>Restorative Practices</b>	<b>Responsive Classroom</b>
Addresses the needs of the school community	Positive community
Build healthy relationships between educators and students	Effective management
Reduce, prevent, and improve harmful behavior	Engaging academics
Repair harm and restore relationships	Developmental awareness
Resolve conflict, hold individuals and groups accountable	

The International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) has presented several case studies on the impact of restorative practices in resolving conflict. According to the IIRP (2019):

A restorative school is one which takes a restorative approach to resolving conflict and preventing harm. Restorative approaches enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm to those responsible, and for those responsible to acknowledge this impact and take steps to put it right. (Wachtel, 2019, para. 3).

The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom at School Z resulted from an analysis of the school suspension rate. School Z offered few other student incentives to deter negative behavior or methods to proactively address poor decision-making. In review of various behavioral strategies, the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom appeared to address the identified void. This paper answers the problem of practice: Does the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom shift a school’s climate and impact student behavior?

Restorative practices were selected for School Z because the method intends to teach appropriate behavioral response, conflict resolution, and personal accountability, and in a K–5 elementary school, this is the primary purpose—to teach and not punish (**Table 2**). Educators

across the nation recognize the importance of fostering positive, healthy school climates and helping students learn from their mistakes (Schott Foundation, 2014). The IIRP (Costello, Costello, & Wachtel, 2009) provided restorative questions as a guide following a disciplinary infraction:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected and in what way?
- What's been the hardest thing for you?
- What needs to happen in order to make things right?

The Schott Foundation of Massachusetts supports public education and is guided by the belief that all children, regardless of race, class, or native language can succeed in school, given the proper resources. The Foundation seeks to develop and strengthen a broad-based and representative movement to achieve fully resourced, quality pre-K–12 public education (Schott Foundation, 2014).

In 2014, the Schott Foundation created an educator's toolkit to guide the creation of a positive school culture and climate. This toolkit outlines the integration of restorative practices and its benefits in comparison to a traditional zero-tolerance policy. According to the Schott Foundation (2014):

Restorative practices allow individuals who may have committed harm to take full responsibility for their behavior by addressing the individual(s) affected by the behavior. Taking responsibility requires understanding how the behavior affected others,

acknowledging that the behavior was harmful to others, taking action to repair the harm, and making changes necessary to avoid such behavior in the future. (p. 10)

Responsive Classroom is another strategy being utilized throughout School Z to support a building goal of sustaining a positive school climate with effective student management. A child cannot learn in chaos, nor can a child learn in fear.

One of the guiding principles of Responsive Classroom, the way we work together as adults to create a safe, joyful, and inclusive school environment, is as important as our individual contribution or competence (Responsive Classroom, 2019). The purpose of simultaneously implementing both restorative practices and Responsive Classroom is to offer teachers and students a comprehensive approach to discipline, behavior management, and school climate.

The researcher's goal was to determine whether there was a relationship between jointly implementing Responsive Classroom and restorative practices and both student behavior and school climate for K–5 Title I students.

Practitioners nationwide will be interested in this research because they will find it difficult to teach without a willing audience. The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom may present a positive approach to addressing student discipline and school climate. These strategies offer educators an alternative to the weight and negativity associated with traditional disciplinary techniques and an unsettled school environment. As additional alternate methods to address school discipline and school climate are presented, further research will be required to assess their effectiveness.

## **Purpose of Study**

Through this process at Rider University, the researcher embarked upon improvement research, seeking to identify and share the effect of the joint implementation of Responsive Classroom and restorative practices at a Title I K–5 elementary school in New Jersey. This action research project focused on school climate and student behavior. The research will include 2016–2019 suspension rates (see **Table 9**) and school climate survey results for grades 3–5.

The issues of school climate and student behavior within School Z were important to the researcher because the public’s perception of School Z has historically been negative. In researching the history of School Z, nothing catastrophic or event atypical to elementary schools had been reported by the district, state, or federal Department of Education, but if asking a community member about School Z, negative feedback would be received. According to a 2018 assessment of school image:

School image, or the reputation of the school, represents or describes the manner in which the school activities and its study program are perceived by the publics. It is feelings and beliefs about the school and its program in the minds of the publics. It is an aggregate psychological impression that is based on the past and present, true and false experiences and information related to the school. (Eger et al., 2018, p. 18)

The researcher found the negative perception of School Z to be unacceptable for several reasons:

1. Given the negative perception of the school by the community, the students were not highly regarded by the community.

2. Despite creative programming, grant acquisition, and a cohesive, hardworking staff, the community did not celebrate the hard work or achievements of the school.
3. Given the negative perception of the school by the community, including some parents of School Z, the researcher considered the self-perception of the students within School Z. If an influential community considered School Z to be a negative place, what did the children think as they entered their School Z classrooms? How did their perception of their school impact their behavior, academic performance, and development of self-worth? School is an integral component of a child's identity.

School image is not what the head teachers understand it to be, but the feelings and beliefs about the school and its educational program that exists in the minds of the school publics (Eger et al., 2018). Through this action research, the researcher worked to improve the image of School Z. Communication was a focus within this process. Multiple areas of School Z were analyzed as this process began in 2017: the number of reported and confirmed harassment, intimidation and bullying reports (HIB), the attendance rate, school suspension rate, district climate survey results, report card performance, office referrals, and the state performance report.

“The main task of communication is building identity and creating – communicating the image of the school. Communication also manifests in design and school climate” (Eger et al., 2018, p. 37). The mission statement, school vision, schoolwide initiatives, annual schoolwide goals, monthly school news, weekly classroom events, school calendar, classroom activities, assemblies, student achievements, staff accomplishments, facility updates, grants, field trips, and external resource acquisition were shared with the entire school community in English, Spanish,

and French Creole via newsletters, letters, Dojo messages, email, school website, flyers, and Twitter. This information was also disseminated to the PTA and Title I Stakeholders Committee. “Schools with higher rates of school suspension and expulsion appear to have less satisfactory ratings of school climate, to have less satisfactory school governance structures, and to spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary matters” (Allen et al., 2018, p. 10. For school climate improvements to be successful, everyone with an interest in the district’s schools—school leaders and staff, students, families, and community partners—needs to be informed and involved (American Institutes for Research/US Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2017). The Federal Department of Education has identified the district leader as playing an essential role in securing buy-in from a diverse body of stakeholders.

Choosing the right intervention(s) is an important part of school climate improvements. The intervention does not have to be a program, although choosing an evidence-based program is one option. Interventions also can be strategies, activities, policies, or services. There is no single “right” type of intervention. The important thing is whether it matches your district’s needs, as identified by climate data collection; your district’s readiness to implement it; and how it is implemented. (American Institutes for Research/US Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2017, p. 5)

This action research was important to the researcher because it is essential that the students of School Z develop a love of learning and expressing themselves. This positive student experience can only be cultivated in an environment where the children feel safe and believe that the adults surrounding them have their best interest at heart. Elementary school parents want their children



to receive a quality education, but fundamentally, they want to believe that their children are loved, safe, and listened to throughout the 7-hour school day while they are at work.

The Learning Policy Institute is a nonprofit group that provides research to improve education policy and practice. The philosophy of the institute is that public education improves through the provision of empowering opportunities for all children to develop their abilities, sharing of data and best practices, and on-going inquiry within and across the organization.

According to the Learning Policy Institute (2018):

Because children learn when they feel safe and supported, and their learning is impaired when they are fearful, traumatized, or overcome with emotion, they need both supportive environments and well-developed abilities to manage stress. Therefore, it is important that schools provide a positive learning environment—also known as school climate—that provides support for learning social and emotional skills as well as academic content. (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018, p. 8)

Responsive Classroom began in 1981 as public school educators sought to improve the academic experience of their students. This group of educators formed the Northeast Foundation for Children to further their research and method development. They opened a laboratory school and published multiple books which are still references today, including *Yardsticks*, by cofounder Chip Woods, and *The Morning Meeting Book*, by cofounder Marilyn Clayton. In 1991, Responsive Classroom was adopted within the public schools of Washington DC.

This study is designed to assess the effectiveness of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate and student behavior. Within this study, the researcher will:

- Define a positive school climate and student behavior

- Define an approach to impact school climate as including restorative practices and responsive classroom jointly implemented
- Assess the impact a school’s climate has on student behavior
- Analyze the impact of the joint implementation of restorative practices and responsive classroom use within the school by tracking school climate changes between 2016–2019

*Hypothesis 1*

The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom leads to improvement in school climate.

*Hypothesis 2*

The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom leads to improvement in student behavior. The conceptual framework used in this study is based on theories and concepts of responsive classroom, school climate, and restorative practices.

Restorative practices emphasize values of empathy, respect, honesty, acceptance, responsibility, and accountability (Ashley & Burke, 2009). The School Z core values include empathy, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, integrity, and perseverance.

In 2018, the New Jersey Education Association released a Health and Safety Report which stated in part:

Excluding a student—finding fault and punishing the “guilty”—is ineffective and damaging. There’s no evidence this “retributive justice” deters misbehavior or improves safety. In fact, multiple studies, some found in the report referenced in the first sidebar

item, show excluded students are more likely to fail, drop out, have mental health problems and get involved with the justice system. (Wigmore, 2018)

The report goes on to state that the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have adopted the restorative practices approach for schools.

Inspired by the International Institute of Restorative Practices, Highland Park Public Schools of New Jersey implemented a code of conduct that integrates accountability, social emotional support, and restoration. In addition to a new code of conduct, Highland Park Public Schools employs eight restorative practices-trained teachers and a Dean of Restorative Practices to support its middle and high school students. In 2017–2018, the district reported a suspension rate of 2.3%, down from 9.7% in 2016–2017. The entire Highland Park teaching staff will be trained in restorative practices throughout the 2019–2020 school year. According to Superintendent of Schools Dr. Scott Taylor, “We’re strengthening relationships between kids and adult caretakers and their peers in the school. We’re also promoting a real deep sense of empathy, so the kids feel more connected to their peers and others” (Wigmore, 2018, p. 3).

Stakeholder input regarding the climate of School Z and suspension data will be presented. The steps taken to jointly implement restorative practices and Responsive Classroom, reasons for their implementation, and data demonstrating the result of this joint program implementation will be explained. School Z stakeholders will be defined as district staff, teachers, parents, relatives of students, community members/businessmen, and students of School Z.

## **Problems of Practice**

The researcher measured student behavior and school climate. The questions she sought to answer were:

1. What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate in a K–5 Title I school?
2. What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on student behavior in a K–5 Title I school?

School climate and student behavior are interconnected. A school cannot truly be successful if either are imbalanced. Many schools across the country work to (a) ensure that they promote a positive school climate in order to foster the success and emotional well-being of students, teachers, and staff, and (b) to address situations that exacerbate harmful behavior (youth.gov, n.d.).

Positive school climate has been shown to contribute to student success and school experiences in many important ways. Schools can promote a positive school climate for students and staff members by fostering connectedness through meaningful relationships, creating a sense of safety and freedom from violence, and providing an environment that is tailored to the needs of students (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Negative school climate is tied to multiple negative outcomes for students and has been shown to exacerbate harmful behavior. A negative school climate facilitates opportunities for bullying, violence, and even suicide (Jiang et al., 2010). Negative school climate is associated with a decline in psychosocial and behavioral adjustment, as reflected in measures of self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and problem behavior (Way et al., 2007).

## **Rationale and Significance**

According to a newer study by researchers at the University of Missouri and the University of Virginia (2018), “When teachers and administrators work to create a more positive school climate—which includes presenting and enforcing clear rules and creating positive teacher-student relationships—student suspensions can drop by as much as 10%” (Huang and Cornell, 2018, p. 94).

The examined Title I K–5 elementary school within this action research, School Z, is guided by and defines a positive school climate by the State of New Jersey Department of Educations’ definition (**Appendix A**). The researcher utilizes the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) definition of school climate to guide this research. In defining school climate to provide guidance to the 691 school districts of New Jersey, the NJDOE stated (2019):

An enduring positive school climate and culture are essential conditions for fostering learning and positive youth development that results in productive and fulfilling lives.

The NJDOE supports school efforts to assess, develop and maintain positive school climates and cultures and other conditions that affect student learning and growth. (p. 10)

In a 2018 study, Francis Huang and Dewey Cornell, assessed whether strict but fair discipline and supportive teacher-student relationships impacted lower risk behavior. According to Huang and Cornell (2018):

A positive climate is one where educators and administrators create clear expectations for students, practice consistent discipline and display supportive behavior. This creates a positive school environment for students because they know what is expected of them, they feel respected and supported, and they expect that they will be treated equally and fairly. (p. 38)

In determining the state of school climate, the following was reviewed at School Z: 1) teacher opportunities for professional growth, 2) the condition of the physical school site, 3) public perception about the school, 4) school-based perceptions about the school, 5) discipline data, 6) teacher retention, 7) teacher resources, 8) student resources, 9) celebratory events, 10) school/community communication, and 11) opportunities for student participation beyond the classroom.

A principal's philosophy about the role of school discipline is a key element that decides if discipline is used as an exclusionary or preventative manner (Skiba et al., 2011). Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found through extensive research that the key to inclusive discipline practices is school administrators remaining consistent in how they disperse discipline interventions (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Pennsylvania Avenue School in Atlantic City, New Jersey implemented restorative practices in 2009. According to New Jersey School Performance Reports, the school suspension rate has continuously declined:

- 2011–2012 8.1% suspension rate
- 2015–2016 4.9% suspension rate
- 2016–2017 4.1% suspension rate
- 2017–2018 0% suspension rate

Two components of a positive school climate, as defined by the New Jersey Department of Education (**Appendix A**), are the use of supportive behaviors by staff towards students and towards each other, and clearly defined and articulated expectations. Responsive Classroom and restorative practices aim to build both classroom and school wide communities that are

supported by clear agreements, authentic communication, and specific tools to bring issues and conflicts forward in a helpful way.

## **Definitions**

### *School Climate*

“School climate is the leading factor in explaining student learning and achievement,” (Huang & Carroll, 2018). For the purpose of this research, the definition of the New Jersey Department of Education will be utilized to guide the meaning of school climate (**Appendix A**).

According to the National School Climate Council (n.d.):

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of student’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes:

- Norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe.
- People are engaged and respected.
- Students, families and educators work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision.
- Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.

- Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment. (National School Climate Center, 2019, p. 2).

### *Positive School Climate*

To create a healthy school climate, the National School Climate Center identifies five dimensions that must be highly effective: Safety, Teaching and Learning, Interpersonal Relationships, Institutional Environment, and Staff Only (National School Climate Council, n.d.).

### *Restorative Practices*

The Schott Foundation supports pre-k through 12 public education. Since 2014, the foundation has supported the creation of a positive school culture and climate through the utilization of restorative practices. According to the Schott Foundation, as it provided guidance on creating positive relationships within public schools,

Restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing. Restorative practices are increasingly being applied in individual schools and school districts to address youth behavior, rule violations, and to improve school climate and culture. (Schott Foundation, 2014, para. 4).

### *Responsive Classroom*

Responsive Classroom is a student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline. It is comprised of a set of research, and evidence-based practices designed



to create safe, joyful, and engaging classroom and school communities for both students and teachers (Center for Responsive Schools, 2019).

### *Student Behavior*

Behavior is the way in which one acts or conducts oneself. Evidence-based best practices have identified that behavior is influenced by the type of reinforcements or other consequences received after the behavior occurs (Corwin & Mendler, 1988). Behaviors occur as an emotional reaction, avoidance, or to obtain something desired.

### *Restorative Justice*

Restorative justice is a theory of justice that focuses on mediation and agreement rather than punishment. Offenders must accept responsibility for harm and make restitution with victims. The concept has been around for hundreds of years, with indigenous people, like the Maori, using restorative justice successfully in their communities for generations. In the late 20th century, restorative justice gained traction in the United States and other countries as various groups sought to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system (Schott Foundation, 2014).

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Literature

When considering the management of student behavior issues, a substantial body of literature, as well as logical common sense, points to the advantages of whole school policy over the individual efforts of teachers (De Nobile, 2015).

According to Luiselli et al. (2005), “Many students attending public schools exhibit discipline problems such as disruptive classroom behavior, vandalism, bullying, and violence. Establishing effective discipline practices is critical to ensure academic success and to provide a safe learning environment” (p. 10).

Restorative practices are not a replacement for the code of conduct, but should complement it. There may continue to be a need for a student’s removal from school, based upon the need to ensure building safety. Restorative practices present preventative strategies to avoid negative student behavior and a social emotional way to respond when an infraction occurs.

In 2014, Pittsburgh Public Schools received a grant from the National Institute of Justice, the research agency of the US Department of Justice, to implement and evaluate restorative practices, titled Pursuing Equitable and Restorative Communities (PERC). The RAND Corporation conducted a randomized controlled trial of restorative practices, to analyze the implementation, impacts, and sustainability of PERC for the Pittsburgh Public School system during the 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 school years. Administrative data were obtained from the district and county, while additional data were collected through surveys, staff interviews, and observations in select schools. Key findings were a reduction in the overall use of suspensions that highlight the importance of evaluating school climate improvement efforts through the use

of multiple measures, because a single measure alone may not reveal the full impact (Augustine et al., 2018).

As a result of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom, School Z developed a common language. As the process began, staff, parent, and student surveys were conducted to ascertain the things that held value to them in an academic setting. School stakeholders were asked to conduct a building walkthrough and indicate visible strengths and areas in need of improvement. A student advisory committee was developed, and they shared the student perspective of the playground, cafeteria, hallway, and classroom experience. They began to strategize and develop ideas for schoolwide improvement and increased student engagement.

As School Z stakeholder and teacher committee work continued throughout 2017, the school's mission statement was identified as being disjointed and nonreflective of the current values. The result of monthly meetings was the development of a new mission statement and six core values: trustworthiness, respect, integrity, empathy, responsibility, and perseverance. These words encompass the school rules (be respectful, show empathy, be trustworthy, demonstrate integrity, have perseverance, be responsible) and daily conversation. The values adorn the walls, website, and classrooms and begin every written school communication. Students are selected monthly by their classmates for having demonstrated the core value of the month within the classroom. The winner articulates how they believe that they showed the core value at the recognition assembly. In times of conflict or behavioral infraction, students are asked, "Did you show respect?" or "Could you have been a little more empathetic?" Students have demonstrated comprehension of these six terms and are able to think critically about their responses.

As a result of the 2017 participation in World Kindness Day, School Z students and staff embraced the concept of being kind. Since then, teachers can be heard asking a student, “Was that kind?” The language used within School Z began to shift from negative to positive. Language was used in an inspirational manner, to teach students (through inconsequential verbal interactions) the school’s expectation of their behavior and way of thinking. In providing constant communication to the parents in languages they can understand, they, too, began to understand the school’s philosophy and approach to student engagement.

Situations requiring discipline in schools can, in fact, be opportunities for learning, growth, and community building (Amstutz & Mullet, 2014). Schools must provide ways to effectively address behavior and other complex school issues (Ashley & Burke, 2009). Researchers have discovered common characteristics in schools where students report a positive school climate. The school characteristics include an emphasis on academic achievement, positive relationships among students and teachers, respect for all members of the community, fair and consistent discipline policies, attention to safety issues, and family and community involvement (Wilson, 2009).

### **Significance of Study**

The problem of poor student behavior and ineffective school wide procedures has been identified. Punitive forms of discipline and reactive interventions to negative student behavior have resulted in extremely high suspension and dropout rates in American public schools. The US Department of Education reported that of its 49 million students in 2011–2012, 3.45 million were suspended. According to the Civil Rights Data Collection, black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students, while students with disabilities are

twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as their nondisabled peers (US Office of Civil Rights, 2012).

The Learning Policy Institute encourages schools to educate the whole child in support of student success. Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey (2018) suggested, “Replace zero tolerance policies regarding school discipline with discipline policies focused on explicit teaching of social-emotional strategies and restorative discipline practices that support young people in learning key skills and developing responsibility for themselves and their community” (p. 10).

This researcher sought to identify and implement programs, philosophies, and strategies that are proactive in nature. Responsive Classroom is utilized with all students because its components build community and strengthens students’ self-awareness and self-control. Restorative practices is the chosen model because it maintains the dignity and voice of both offender and victim. When students participate in self-destructive behavior, a negative school climate is created. A positive school climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe (National School Climate Center, 2012).

In 2014–2015, the RAND Corporation and the National Institutes for Health funded a 5-year, cluster-randomized controlled trial of the Restorative Practices Intervention in 16 middle schools in Maine to assess whether restorative practices intervention impacted both positive developmental outcomes and problem behaviors and whether the effects persist during the transition from middle to high school. The 11 Essential Elements of Restorative Practices Intervention were integrated into all relevant aspects of school life (**Table 3**).

**Table 3.***The 11 Essential Elements of Restorative Practices Intervention*

	<b>Essential Practices</b>	<b>Sample Indicators of Proficiency in Practice</b>
I	Affective statements	Use "I" statements; make students aware of positive or negative impact of their behavior; focus on behavior; encourage students to express their feelings
II	Restorative questions	Reflect standard restorative questions (What was the harm? How has it impacted you? What needs to happen to make things right?); require a response
III	Small impromptu conferences	Use to resolve low-level incidents between 2 people; take place as soon as the incident has occurred; use standard restorative questions; use affective statements; ask students to conduct a specific activity to repair harm from the incident
IV	Proactive circles	Comprise $\geq 80\%$ of circles conducted; use to set behavioral expectations (e.g., for academic goal setting or planning, to establish ground rules for student projects, to monitor or build understanding of academic content); use standard restorative questions; use affective statements; run by students, after being facilitated 5 times
V	Responsive circles	Comprise no more than 20% of circles at the school; use in response to behavior or tensions affecting a group of students or entire class; require all people involved to play a role; use standard set of restorative questions; use affective statements
VI	Restorative conferences	Use in response to serious incidents or a pattern of repeated less serious incidents; use standard restorative questions, affective statements, and a trained facilitator
VII	Fair process	Allow students to provide input into decisions; explain the reasoning behind decisions to the students affected; clarify expectations so students understand implications of decision, specific expectations for carrying out the decision, and consequences for not meeting the expectations

*Table continued on next page*

**Table 3.** *Continued from previous page*

---

	<b>Essential Practices</b>	<b>Sample Indicators of Proficiency in Practice</b>
VIII	Reintegrative management of shame	Avoid stigmatizing wrongdoers; discourage dwelling on shame; acknowledge worth of person while rejecting unacceptable behavior (i.e., separate deed from the doer)
IX	Restorative staff community	Use restorative practices to resolve conflicts and proactive circles to build sense of community
X	Restorative approach with families	Use restorative practices during interactions with family members, including proactive circles that focus on intentional communication of positive student behavior and academic achievement
XI	Fundamental hypothesis	Have high expectations for behavior; do not ignore inappropriate behavior; use the appropriate mix of control/pressure and support; minimize use of staff facilitators

---

Acosta et al. (2019)

Despite the implementation of restorative practices, the five-year study findings showed: The intervention did not yield significant changes in the treatment schools. However, student self-reported experience with restorative practices significantly predicted improved school climate and connectedness, peer attachment, and social skills, and reduced cyberbullying victimization. While more work is needed on how interventions can reliably produce restorative experiences, this study suggests that the restorative model can be useful in promoting positive behaviors and addressing bullying. (Acosta et al., 2019, p. 10)

Student achievement and behavior management are at the forefront of academic research. Researchers are just beginning to analyze the impact of school climate on student behavior. The United States Office of Civil Rights (OCR) reported that 2.7 million students were suspended at least once in 2015–2016. This represents 6% of all American public school students (OCR, 2018). A student's chance of graduating high school decreased by 20% with each suspension (Balfanz et al., 2013).

Huang and Cornell (2018) studied the relationship of school climate with out-of-school suspensions. This study tested the hypothesis that an authoritative school climate (ASC), characterized by strict but fair discipline and supportive teacher-student relationships, was associated with a lower likelihood of suspensions (Huang & Cornell). The researchers recognized out-of-school suspension as a serious concern. Their results indicated that a higher ASC was associated with a lower likelihood of receiving a suspension (Huang & Cornell). The outcome of the study indicated that in the presence of a positive school climate, there was a low likelihood of being suspended.



The New Jersey Department of Education reported that more than 50,000 students were suspended from school in 2017–2018. Over 17,000 students were suspended more than once that school year. As school districts create their code of conduct, they are focused on maintaining a safe, distraction-free school environment, but at whose expense? The staggering number of student suspensions within the 605 districts of New Jersey presents a problem. Either schools have lost control, or schools have lost their student-centered focus. The 50,000 student suspensions in 2017–2018 represents a total loss of 150,024 school days for the children removed (O’Dea, 2019).

Out-of-school suspensions (e.g., lost instructional time, greater school disengagement, increased risk of dropping out, heightened chances of incarceration), leave children at home unsupervised and susceptible to misadventure and adverse behavior. Suspension also does little to teach appropriate alternative behavior nor address underlying issues that may be causing the bad behavior (Ferguson, 2012). The Department has been working with districts to identify programs, practices and other resources to improve school climate and social and emotional development for students and educators (NJ Department of Education, 2018). If the student then misses schoolwork, his or her grades will decline, further increasing the student’s detachment from the academic environment (Ferguson, 2012). The student code of conduct is punitive (**Supplemental Table 2**).

Schools offer unique opportunities to improve belonging for school-aged children. Teacher support and positive personal characteristics were the strongest predictors of school belonging (Allen et al. 2018). Researchers note that the development of antisocial behavior in children begins with minor transgressions and gradually advances toward more significant expressions of deviance as they enter adolescence. Early onset combined with progressive deterioration toward more varied and extreme antisocial behaviors characterizes the most seriously delinquent youth (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Effective schools exert positive

influences on student behavior despite conditions in the home, social status, gender, race, or ethnicity (McEvoy & Welker).

### **School Climate**

Students thrive when they feel safe and supported. Schools must ensure a positive school climate by using positive discipline methods (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Under ESSA, Title I local educational agency plans must be designed to strengthen academic programs and improve school conditions for student learning (US Department of Education, n.d.). According to the National School Climate Center, school climate is based on patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

One potential approach to the reduction in overall suspension rates and the associated disparities is the improvement of school climate. In a 2017 study, Heilbrun et al found that school climate initiatives helped to improve student behavior and reduce student suspension. Building positive relationships, providing clearly defined expectations, and engaging in community building activities enhances the learning environment and productivity. In determining the essential components of an effective school, a recent study, "Educating the Whole Child," stated the creation of a positive school conditions and climate, featuring relational trust and respect between and among staff, students, and parents were imperative (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

An important aspect of a positive school climate is safety. The term "safety" can describe the level of comfort a student feels within a building in relation to others, as well as feeling

nonthreatened by speaking aloud in the classroom. It is incumbent upon schools to ensure a student's sense of belonging. Instead of promoting competitions, which could create a divide, team-building activities are preferred as a positive school climate is created. Given that student perceptions of the school climate may counteract certain risk factors, understanding how students feel about their school is an important first step in decreasing the probability of negative student outcomes (Loukas, 2007).

Another aspect of a positive school climate is building cleanliness. From elementary schools to college campuses, an unclean, untidy environment can be detrimental to students' learning experience (Amstutz, 2008). Unkempt facilities could lead to poor student health and student absence. Time missed in the classroom may cause a student to fall behind academically. Cleanliness ranked as the fourth most important building element to impact the students' personal learning (Amstutz). Throughout the hiring process, it is critical to secure professionals who would take pride in their work, including cleanliness. The goal would be to hire someone who truly desired to become a part of the school community, not someone who strictly sought employment.

### **Effects of a Positive School Climate**

The New Jersey Department of Education strongly believes in the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools and recognizes the research that students who were taught SEL skills were less likely to have conduct problems and engage in substance abuse (NJ Department of Education, 2018). The effectiveness of teachers is determined by several factors. One important factor is workplace climate–school climate (McGiboney, 2016). According to Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey (2018):

A positive school environment, also referred to as school climate, greatly affects students' ability to learn social, emotional, and academic skills. The climate sets the tone at a school and can be seen in the physical environment, experienced during the learning process, and felt in how people within the school interact with one another. (para. 10)

Effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning challenges. To be effective, professional development requires thoughtful planning followed by careful implementation with feedback to ensure it responds to educators' learning needs (Mizell, 2010). ESSA also seeks school compliance in the areas of professional development, high-quality instruction, and comprehensive learning supports based on the unique needs of the school community (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Studies show that the quality of school climate is not only important to students and their social competency, social emotional development, academic outcomes, and other quality of life factors, it is equally important to teacher effectiveness, teacher job satisfaction, and teacher retention (McGiboney, 2016). Many of the studies consider the broader view of prevention and intervention to include the wide range of benefits that stem from improving school climate for all students and reduce the conditions for misbehaviors such as bullying (McGiboney). The importance of viewing school climate as a prevention concept was supported by a study that looked at the challenges to school safety when students did not feel that the school climate included positive relationships between students and staff members (McGiboney). The Virginia High School Safe Study indicated that the efforts of the school to create a positive school climate was a good strategy to prevent bullying and threats of violence.

## **Impact of a Negative School Climate**

Despite the many negative consequences of receiving an out-of-school suspension, it continues to be a frequent response to disciplinary infractions, some of which may be considered minor (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). The New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association suggest each school create a School Safety/Climate Team to develop, foster, and maintain a positive school climate.

Negative school climate is linked to harmful behaviors, decreased student achievement, and increased incidents of bullying. The quality of teacher instruction diminishes in a poor school climate and students are held to a lower set of academic expectations. Additionally, in poor school climates, communication between school and home declines (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2007). Increasingly, research is showing that perceptions of school climate also influence student behavioral and emotional problems. Behavioral problems are characterized by acting-out behaviors such as fighting, lying, and cheating (National Association of Elementary School Principals). A study by the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education on incidences of planned attacks in schools concluded that a positive school climate is the central tool in preventing school violence (2016).

The study also suggested that unless or until school climate becomes more positive, those personal characteristics like self-esteem that prevent or discourage behaviors such as bullying will languish, which can jeopardize the safety and well-being of students and staff members (McGiboney, 2016). The school climate literature emphasizes the capacities of students to succeed, and it avoids the tendency to demonize at-risk students in ways that diminish their chances for success (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).

Research shows that, overwhelmingly, the students who are most at risk of receiving a suspension are either male, nonwhite, of low socioeconomic status, have a disability or a combination of these characteristics (Huang & Cornell, 2018). Within this study, the research suggests that a positive school climate can be helpful for all students, regardless of their background (Huang & Cornell). Completed studies have also demonstrated the benefit to utilizing consistent, integrated positive behavior management techniques to dissuade poor behavior and reduce the occurrence of student misbehavior.

### **Restorative Practices**

As this researcher analyzed out-of-school suspensions as a result of inappropriate student behavior it was found that the consequence may have a negative effect on the child. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2014):

Suspension and expulsion can influence a number of adverse outcomes across development, health, and education. Young students who are expelled or suspended are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not. (para. 10)

Restorative practices are a nonpunitive way to respond to conflict. Restorative practice is a proactive approach to discipline. Restorative practices allow individuals who may have committed harm to take full responsibility for their behavior by addressing the individual(s) affected by their behavior (Schott Foundation, 2014). “Learning is a transactional process in which both students and teachers must learn how to understand and communicate with each

other, and in which trust creates conditions for reduced anxiety and greater motivation” (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018, p. 17).

According to Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey (2018),

In addition to meeting basic needs for food and health care, schools can buffer the effects of stress by facilitating supportive adult-child relationships that extend over time; building a sense of self-efficacy and control by teaching and reinforcing social and emotional skills that help children handle adversity, such as the ability to calm emotions and manage responses; and creating dependable, supportive routines for both managing classrooms and checking in on student needs. (p. 12)

Restorative approaches to school discipline are increasingly being implemented throughout the United States to reduce reliance on suspension and eradicate the racial discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016). Restorative practices are integrated throughout the school day; however, it is not a program or curriculum. Students are encouraged and given a safe space to express personal thoughts, feelings, and ideas regarding the school community. The atmosphere that is created is one of trust, belonging, and respect. Restorative practices attempt to strengthen social connection and responsibility for one another by increasing opportunities for effective communication (Gregory et al., 2016). The findings of a 2015 Rutgers University study found that higher implementation of restorative practices was associated with a lower use of disruption/ defiance disciplinary referrals with Latino and African American students (Gregory et al., 2016).

The International Institute for Restorative Practices offers a 3-year school implementation timeline. The first 6 months were identified for planning, resource analysis, and open dialogue with school stakeholders. Year 1 called for staff training and professional learning community development to sustain the change in disciplinary approach. Year 2 progressed to continued

professional development and coaching. A commitment must be made by all stakeholders to sustain the strategies.

In 2014, Pittsburgh Public Schools applied for and received a grant from the National Institute of Justice to adopt restorative practices, seeking support to make the schools safer. During this school year, there was a 20% out-of-school suspension rate.

Suspension rates have gone down in Pittsburgh Public Schools overall in the past few years, but data showed that the new program further reduced both the number of days students were suspended and the number of suspensions. Not only were students less likely to be suspended, but they were less likely to be suspended multiple times. In the schools that did not implement restorative practices, days lost to suspension in the district declined by 18 percent from the 2014–15 school year to the 2016–17 school year, but in the schools that did implement restorative practices, suspension rates declined by 36 percent. (National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2017, p. 6)

On January 21, 2020, New Jersey Governor Phillip Murphy signed bill S-2564/A-3519 into law. This law requires the Department of Education to create a 3-year Restorative Justice in Education Pilot Program. The program must be developed within 6 months with the goals:

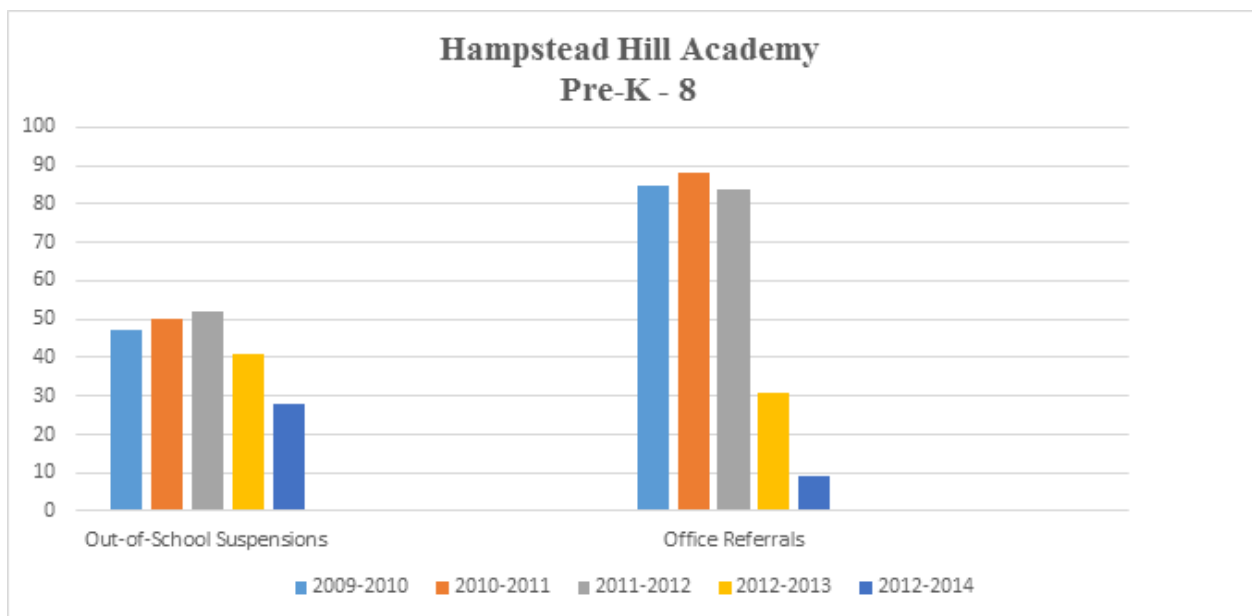
1. Reduce racial disparities in school discipline;
2. Improve the socioemotional and behavioral responses of students through more appropriate, and less punitive, interventions; and
3. To reduce recidivism rates among students who violate the school district code of conduct (S-2564/A-3519, 2020).



## Effects of Restorative Practices

Students need a sense of physical and psychological safety for learning to occur, because fear and anxiety undermine cognitive capacity and short-circuit the learning process (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Hampstead Hill Academy, of Baltimore, MD, began to implement restorative practices in the 2008–2009 school year (**Figure 1; Table 4**). During this year, the academy reported 71 out-of-school suspensions and 103 office referrals (IIRP, 2014).

**Figure 1. Hampstead Hill Academy Pre-K–8 Out-of-School Suspensions and Office Referrals, 2009–2014**



**Table 4.**

*Hampstead Hill Academy Pre-K–8 Out-of-School Suspensions and Office Referrals, 2009–2014*

---

	<b>2009–2010</b>	<b>2010–2011</b>	<b>2011–2012</b>	<b>2012–2013</b>	<b>2013–2014</b>
Out-of-school suspensions	47	50	52	41	28
Office referrals	85	88	84	31	9

---

(Wachtel, 2014)

Restorative practices began in the fall of 2018 at School Z. The school adopted this disciplinary philosophy to address the high suspension rate and low teacher morale due to student behavior. Restorative practices have been presented as a positive, proactive, unified method for the entire school community—students and staff alike—to improve their daily school day experience.

Within many communities, schools have deemphasized traditional school-based disciplinary interventions, while greatly expanding the use of zero-tolerance disciplinary approaches to exclude students from their schools through out-of-school suspension, expulsions, and referrals to alternate schools or programs. Restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing (Schott Foundation, 2014). Restorative practices work when they are implemented schoolwide and integrated into the fabric of the school community.

The state requires public school districts to develop and effectively implement comprehensive educational programs to individual learning and behavior. According to the New Jersey Administrative Code (2018):

Each public school district's board of education is required to develop, adopt and implement a code of student conduct (CSC) that establishes standards, policies and procedures for positive student development and student behavioral expectations on school grounds, including on school buses or at school-sponsored functions, and, if determined appropriate by the board, conduct away from school grounds. (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1(a))

Judy Mullet examined the progression from a punitive to empathetic response to student behavior. Within her research, she focused on how the immediate loss of privilege stops the negative behavior only temporarily, without a long-term change in behavior. According to Mullet (2014):

By focusing on the harm done to relationships, restorative justice practitioner's view discipline as an opportunity to understand the relational nature of misbehavior, mend relationships, and make restitution. Restorative discipline offers a collaborative approach steeped in inquiry-based methodology that is ripe for further experimentation and research. (p. 32)

“Studies have found, for example, that even in elementary school, when students learn and practice skills of conflict resolution, they become more inclined to work out problems among themselves before the problems escalate” (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). The aim of restorative practices is to create contexts for learning in which the voice of another may be heard (Hammel, 2018). In a recent 2-year evaluation of the implementation of restorative practices in two schools, a decrease in the amount of discipline referrals, as well as suspensions, was found in both (Kline, 2016). In a recent study, administrators reported that through the

restorative approach, their relationships with teachers improved and became more collaborative, rather than strictly supervisory (Harrison, 2007).

### **Responsive Classroom**

The four domains of Responsive Classroom are: 1) Engaging Academics, 2) Positive Community, 3) Effective Management, and 4) Developmentally Responsive Teaching (Center for Responsive Schools, 2019). Giving students a voice through morning meeting or classroom norm establishment, embracing ethnicity by diversifying the classroom library and celebrating a variety of holidays, and implementing brain-breaks, otherwise known as pauses within lengthy lessons to rejuvenate the body and refocus the mind, are all components of responsive classroom. These are also steps by which a positive school climate is created.

In order for students to be successful inside and outside of school, the Responsive Classroom approach supports the students' need to learn a set of social and emotional competencies—cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control—and a set of academic competencies—academic mindset, perseverance, learning strategies, and academic behaviors (Center for Responsive Schools, 2019). Crafting school and classroom environments that support and encourage positive student behavior as well as learning requires recognizing that academic, social, and emotional learning are interconnected—and that they can be explicitly taught (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

### **Effects of Responsive Classroom**

Warm, caring, supportive student-teacher relationships, as well as other child-adult relationships are linked to better school performance and engagement, greater social competence,

and willingness to take on challenges (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Responsive Classroom features classroom quiet time, where students can decompress and individually prepare for their upcoming tasks, as well as closing circles, where daily student achievement is celebrated, formalized self-reflection is encouraged, and a trusted classroom community is established through sharing. Responsive Classroom was recently endorsed as one of 21 recommended programs by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning for its high-quality design, support for implementation, and evidential basis (CASEL, 2013). Responsive Classroom embeds modeling of prosocial behavior, collaboration, and self-control into instructional practices. Responsive Classroom is designed to align with existing curricula in the school rather than introducing content with an SEL focus (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014). Responsive Classroom was selected for School Z to strengthen student ownership of their classroom environment, improve student/teacher relationships, and provide a calm classroom structure where trust, respect, and appropriate student behavior are the norm.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom began within School Z in September 2017. The approach included the school district, researcher, staff, students, and parents. School climate is larger than any one person's experience. When people work together, a group process emerges that is bigger than any one person's actions (National School Climate Center, 2014).

To begin the process, the researcher was trained at the International Institute for Restorative Practices, and the researched school district imposed a dedicated time within the school day to conduct morning meetings, a critical component of Responsive Classroom. The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom was presented to the community at back-to-school night, within mailed and backpacked family communications, the September PTA meeting, and Title I Stakeholder Committee meetings. A synopsis accompanied by examples and resources were disseminated and reviewed by the community.

Students were introduced to restorative practices by the researcher. Subsequent support for restorative practices has been given to students by the classroom teachers. As the joint implementation began in September 2017, School Z conducted circles within each grade level, built upon the philosophy of having a growth mindset to developing schoolwide positive talk and proactive student/adult interactions, and held daily morning meetings within all K–5 classrooms. Through the utilization of both morning meetings and restorative circles, the School Z community developed six unique core values for the school that have become the school's

common language, school rules, and standard of both student and staff behavior. According to Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey (2018):

The primary goal of K–12 education should be to empower individual students to reach their full potential. Environments that are relationship-rich and attuned to students’ learning and developmental needs can buffer students’ stress, foster engagement, and support learning. (para. 17)

This research is very important to our young learners because as educators, our goal is for students to succeed in school and become contributing members of society. Some adults may say that our children will not have the opportunity to impact our society until they mature into adults, but as a school administrator, the researcher knows that students are poised to be contributing members of society each time they enter the school house. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society (National School Climate Center, 2014).

As strategies to improve student behavior and school climate, the School Z community discussed the impact of out-of-school suspension:

- Student misses instruction
- Student falls behind academically
- Lack of adult supervision at home
- Increased access to unsupervised technology (cell, cable, computer, video games)
- Increased student detachment from academic environment
- Does not teach appropriate alternative behavior

- Does not address root cause of improper behavior
- Strains parent/school collaboration

The researcher selected improvement research because to ensure that the action research directly benefited the school community. This research summarizes the significance of schoolwide goals:

1. A positive school climate
2. Clear and effective school rules
3. Improved student behavior

As the researcher conducted a July and September 2017 building assessment of the staff, students, and parents, the topics of student behavior, staff morale, and parental engagement rose to the top of everyone's list. The term that was frequently repeated was "consistency." The researcher began to seek strategies for improvement. Responsive Classroom was district initiated and supported. Teachers had a familiarity with the concept of morning meetings; therefore, the researcher knew to build upon this resource and further develop it within School Z. As the classroom was being enriched by Responsive Classroom, the researcher had to address the identified concerns throughout the entire school.

With the minor complications of lack of time, professional or financial resources, the researcher adopted restorative practices as a method to address and unite the entire school community. The specific strategies within restorative practices and Responsive Classroom are behaviors and explanations, not programs. The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom address school climate and student behavior in a proactive manner. The domains within each strategy are positive and proactive, not punitive or solely reactive. Actively



making a daily effort to maintain a positive school climate and improved student behavior teaches students:

1. To be independent thinkers
2. To become self-reflective
3. To assume accountability skills
4. To develop life skills

In conducting this action research, the researcher sought to improve the school experience of School Z. The purpose of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom is to support students and staff in the classroom and schoolwide. Personalizing the educational setting so that it responds to individual students' interests and needs, as well as their home and community contexts, is one of the most powerful levers to change the trajectories for children's lives (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

From September 2017 through June 2019, Responsive Classroom was monitored by the building administrator and school culture climate specialist. Monthly review of K–5 lesson plans, classroom walk-throughs, and conversations held with homeroom teachers were conducted by this researcher. Weekly information about Responsive Classroom resources have been shared electronically with the staff, in addition to the presentation, provision, and review of Responsive Classroom books, pamphlets, and tool kits. Articulation time within faculty meetings, as well as grade-level release time has been given for teachers to review, question, and plan Responsive Classroom strategies.

The school culture climate specialist provided workshops within faculty meetings, developed and provided homeroom-specific lesson plans, and modeled morning meetings within

individual classrooms. The school culture climate specialist monitored teacher understanding and student effectiveness through peer articulation and response to inquiry.

From September 2017 through June 2019, restorative practices were monitored by the building administrator and the school culture climate specialist. Office referrals, student attendance, and school suspensions were tracked. This information was made public monthly by both the district and school, followed by a concise review by the school stakeholders each trimester of the two school years of 2017–2018 and 2018–2019. Use of common language, school wide and classroom circles, and reflection sheets within the building increased. In September 2017, restorative practices were the conversation and focus of a district director and three building administrators. By June 2019, it was the conversation and focus of all building administrators and guidance counselors within the district. In addition, planning to incorporate restorative practices within the K–12 district code of conduct began. A punitive environment undermines learning by heightening anxiety and stress, placing extra demands on working memory and cognitive resources, which drains energy available to address classroom tasks (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

The following are the publicly stated school wide goals as reported to the federal government through the annual school Every Student Succeeds Act, district directors, and school stakeholders (**Table 5**).

**Table 5.**

*2017–2018 and 2018–2019 Z Schoolwide Goals*

<b>2017–2018 Goals</b>	<b>2018–2019 Goals</b>
Increase parent engagement	Increase parent involvement
Improve school climate	Enhance instructional practices
Enhance reading skills and scores	Improve math skills and scores

Presented to the schoolwide community frequently in written, electronic, and face-to-face format between September 2017 and June 2019 were the specific strategies to identify how School Z approaches discipline and school climate (**Table 6**).

**Table 6.**

*2017–2019 Responsive Classroom/Restorative Practices*

<b>Responsive Classroom and Restorative Practices Timeframe</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Result</b>
2017–2018	To become a New Jersey School of Character	—
2018–2019	—	School Z titled a 2019–2024 New Jersey and National School of Character by Character.Org

School Z teachers participated in article studies during faculty meetings, in addition to a full-day professional development session to address restorative practices and responsive classroom. Videos were shared with staff of various restorative circles and morning meetings in action, in addition to testimonials from teachers and students nationwide regarding the

implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. Research was presented to the staff and classroom resources such as reflection sheets, and morning meeting agendas were provided. A teacher leader was identified to guide teachers, provide in-class support, and model for teachers. The identified teacher leader has had the opportunity to receive formal restorative practices and Responsive Classroom training in order to better guide staff.

Teachers had the opportunity to observe and facilitate restorative circles. Teachers have had the opportunity to observe morning meetings, energizers, quiet time, and closing circles, in addition to conducting them. Students were introduced to Responsive Classroom by their classroom teacher.

During a November 2018 staff activity, teachers shared their thoughts about their professional home, School Z. “School Z is . . . a family, supportive, a safe place, welcoming to families, accepting of diversity, a place for growth, a special community, a place where students want to learn, moving forward, a small school with a big heart, a school that cares about students, unique, the best kept secret in town, my second home . . . home!”

### **Participants in Action Research**

This study was a quantitative analysis of surveys and disciplinary data. Survey data were collected from the 2016–2017, 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 district administration of their New Jersey Department of Education School Climate Survey (**Appendix C**). In addition, the 2016–2019 School Z suspension and attendance rates were collected and analyzed.

The researched school district requires elementary students in grades 3, 4, and 5 to complete the district NJSCS each spring. The district NJSCS is prominently placed on the

district website, as well as that of its individual schools. The school community is notified of its presence with a request to participate via telephone and letter. Computers are also made available throughout the schools for parents and families. For students, the district NJSCS is conducted within the classroom, supervised by the homeroom teacher. School Z class sizes are capped; therefore, the number of student participants remains consistent annually: 40 in grade 3, 45 in grade 4, and 45 in grade 5. The school staff has remained constant between 2016 and 2019. This survey is utilized because it is standard throughout the State of New Jersey, as well as within the researched school district.

The NJSCS is a survey completed by all district students in grades 3–12. Building-specific results are provided to school leaders and the public annually. This data set represents the responses of School Z students in grades 3, 4, and 5, as well as staff and any parent participants. This survey demonstrates changes in the areas of student behavior and school climate. This survey assesses the following nine domains (**Appendix C**):

- Relationships
- Parental support and engagement
- Emotional environment
- Morale in the school community
- Safety
- Teaching and learning
- Physical environment
- Perception of administrator support
- Inclusion and diversity

## Design for Action

In review of the study, the researcher has found that there are various methodological approaches used to conduct research on the topics of school climate and student behavior. The primary methods are quantitative and qualitative analysis. A quantitative approach will be used because the research utilized surveys.

**Table 7.**

*Research Questions*

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Collection Tool</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
6.94% of the School Z population was suspended in 2016–2017	What impact does the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom have on student behavior in a K–5 Title I school?	District NJSCS 2016–2019 Spring Survey School Z 2016–2019 suspension rate	District NJSCS Results—School Z Students: Grades 3, 4, and 5 District NJSCS Results—School Z Parents and Staff 2016–2019 School Z K–5 suspensions	The researcher will compare the school suspension rate from 2016–2019; this window will represent before restorative practices and responsive classroom were jointly implemented to a period that they were fully integrated
Negative school climate	What impact does the joint implementation of restorative practices and responsive classroom have on school climate in a Title I K–5 school?	School Z K–5 suspensions 2016–2019 School Z 2016–2019 NJSCS	Surveys Board of Education NJ School Performance Report US Office of Civil Rights	The researcher compared the school climate pre- and postsurveys jointly implementing restorative practices and Responsive Classroom to assess their impact

## **Overview of Methodology**

In 2012, the NJDOE, in collaboration with the Bloustein Center for Survey Research at Rutgers University, developed and disseminated the New Jersey School Climate Survey (NJSCS) and supportive materials. To validate the tool, the NJDOE worked with Bloustein to conduct a validity/reliability study. The purpose of the NJSCS is to assist the school district in reinforcing positive conditions and address vulnerabilities for learning (New Jersey Climate Survey Summary, 2012).

This action research utilized a quantitative approach. Surveys are an essential method of collecting feedback from a large population. In this case, School Z students and staff responded to surveys. The revised 2014 NJSCS included four validated questionnaires to support local school climate and culture improvement activities as an integral part of their continuous efforts to improve student's education and prevent at-risk student behavior (NJ Department of Education, 2014).

The NJSCS was designed to collect and analyze objective information from diverse school populations (student and staff) for reinforcing positive conditions and addressing vulnerabilities in local conditions for learning. These school-wide conditions for learning promote a positive school climate where students and adults feel safe, connected, and supported. The NJSCS measures conceptual domains, or categories, which together represent a school's overall climate.

## Research Setting

The Title I K–5 elementary school examined by this researcher was School Z. School Z is a small, neighborhood school with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged families (**Table 1**). This elementary school community consists of foster children, homeless children, transient children, and students who have suffered childhood trauma. School Z and the staff within are tremendously important to the 240 learners that cross the threshold daily. School Z should represent a safe school home, defined by a positive school climate, and clearly defined behavior management techniques. According to Noddings (2005):

We will not find the solution to problems of violence, alienation, ignorance, and unhappiness in increasing our security apparatus, imposing more tests, punishing schools for their failure to produce 100 percent proficiency. Instead, we must allow teachers and students to interact as whole persons, and we must develop policies that treat the school as a whole community. (para. 19)

Structured, schoolwide procedures to teach students respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, empathy, integrity, and perseverance should be incorporated by teachers and leadership in order to ensure a positive school climate.

This researcher sought to impact student behavior (Table 9) through the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. School Z is home to a very diverse group of learners (Table 8). The two identified strategies were selected in review of School Z suspension data and inquiries related to school climate.



**Table 8.***School Z Enrollment by Racial and Ethnic Group*

<b>Racial and Ethnic Group</b>	<b>2016–2017, %</b>	<b>2017–2018, %</b>	<b>2018–2019, %</b>
White	3.4	3.6	2.6
Hispanic	42.2	43.1	44.9
Black or African American	48.7	48.4	49.2
Asian	0.9	0.8	0.7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.9	0.4	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0	0.0	0
Two or more races	3.9	3.6	2.6

[NJ School Performance Report 2017-2018](#)**Table 9.***School Z Out-of-School Suspensions*

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Suspensions, n</b>
2016–2017	17
2017–2018	14
2018–2019	8

Quality of school climate impacts student feelings of connectedness to the school and, in turn, the level of connectedness is directly predictive of how students behave and feel (Loukas, 2007). The researcher sought to utilize the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom to influence behaviors that could lead to out-of-school suspension.

## **Questions and Hypothesis**

The researcher measured student behavior and school climate. The problems of practice were: What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate in a K–5 Title I school? What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on student behavior in a K–5 Title I school?

## **Hypotheses**

### *Hypothesis 1*

The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom leads to improvement in school climate.

### *Hypothesis 2*

The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom leads to improvement in student behavior.

### **Null Hypothesis**

There is no statistical relationship between perceptions of the extent of the joint implementation of Responsive Classroom and restorative practices on school climate and student behavior within a Title I K–5 elementary school.

### **Alternate (Research) Hypothesis**

There is a statistical relationship between perceptions of the extent of the joint implementation of Responsive Classroom and restorative practices on school climate and student behavior within a Title I K–5 elementary school.

### **Dependent Variables**

The dependent variables within this action research were school climate and student behavior.

### **Independent Variables**

This 2-year action research consists of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom.

### **Evaluating Improvement Progress**

The Rider University Institutional Review Board approved this research, and the researcher received consent from the researched school district to conduct research within. Students, staff, parents, and stakeholders within this study were not identified. Confidentiality of all subjects will be maintained.

## CHAPTER 4

### Description of Findings

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the researchers present data gathered in analysis of school climate and student behavior. School climate is defined as the leading factor in explaining student learning and achievement (Huang & Cornell, 2018). The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of alternate disciplinary techniques on student behavior and school climate in a K–5 Title I elementary school (**Table 1**). For the purpose of this study, the New Jersey Department of Education’s definition of school climate will be utilized (**Appendix A**).

To create a healthy school climate, the National School Climate Center identifies five dimensions that must be highly effective: Safety, Teaching and Learning, Interpersonal Relationships, Institutional Environment, and Staff Only (National School Climate Council, n.d.). Student behavior is defined as the way in which one acts or conducts oneself. Evidence-based best practices have identified that behavior is influenced by the type of reinforcements or other consequences received after the behavior occurs (Curwin & Mendler, 1988). Behaviors occur as an emotional reaction, avoidance, or to obtain something desired.

Information within this chapter will document if the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom had a statistical effect on School Z between the 2016–2017 school year and 2018–2019 school year (**Table 8**). School Z staff and students were fully introduced to restorative practices and Responsive Classroom in 2017. The researcher sought to answer two questions within this research:

1. What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate in a K–5 Title I school?
2. What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on student behavior in a K–5 Title I school?

Data collection tools utilized within this research were not created by the researcher, but by the New Jersey Department of Education in cooperation with Rutgers University and Character.Org. My assumptions and bias were not a factor in data collection, analysis, or presentation within this document. The New Jersey Department of Education School Climate Survey was administered by classroom teachers and reported directly to the school district. The Character.Org school analysis was completed by privately trained school assessors, with results reported directly to Character.Org in Washington, DC. The instrument used was created by the Character Education Partnership. The areas of School Z that were analyzed correspond with 11 principles which serve as criteria for schools to plan a character education program. This action research has provided parameters within which students, staff, and parents can utilize common language towards unified goals.

To address the two research questions in this action research study, the New Jersey School Climate Survey was administered in spring 2017 and spring 2019 to students and staff, School Z suspension and attendance rates of 2016–2017 and 2018–2019 were collected and compared. In addition, January 2018 and January 2019 Character.Org rubric scores for School Z were analyzed.

In 2018, Huang and Cornell conducted a study to test whether a positive school climate was associated with a lower likelihood of suspensions. The results indicated that a more positive

school climate was associated with a lower likelihood of receiving an out-of-school suspension. (Huang & Cornell). Suspensions are reported by the school district monthly (**Table 9**). Student suspensions are an indication of negative student behavior, which could result from several factors, including a poor school climate (**Supplemental Table 2**). Out-of-school suspensions at School Z decreased slightly within the researched period of time; however, the suspension rate did not present a significant statistical change between 2017 and 2019 (**Table 16**). The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of alternate disciplinary techniques on student behavior and school climate in a K–5 Title I elementary school (**Table 19**). This action research was conducted to change student behavior and school climate. Within this chapter, data will be presented to identify whether the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom impacted student behavior and school climate.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The researcher identified several limitations to this study. First, using a single location for school analysis made the sample size relatively small. This researcher monitored the school climate and student behavior within one K–5 Title I elementary school. In future studies, the researcher could compare two schools, one that has jointly implemented restorative practices and Responsive Classroom compared with an annual analysis of a school that has not. A researcher could also analyze a group of schools in different school districts that have jointly implemented restorative practices and Responsive Classroom and review the outcome. This would also address the two additional limitations that the researcher identified, small student and staff sample size. In a broader study, factors such as race, economic status, faculty size, and student support resources may play a more substantial role.

Delimitations to the study include its limitation to School Z students and staff. The group of School Z students participating in these surveys included third, fourth, and fifth grade students. This set of students was included in this research due to its familiarity with survey completion, district identification to represent elementary schools, and time spent in School Z. The teachers surveyed were not inclusive of itinerant teachers. This researcher did not consider “I don’t know” survey responses in the statistical analysis. In a future study, the researcher could include all staff members and second grade students. In a future study, the researcher could exclude students who report being enrolled in the school for less than 1 year.

### **Characteristics**

School Z is one of 17 elementary schools within a district of 24 schools. While the district is home to neighborhood elementary schools, because of the growing population, old facilities, class-size limitations and limited resources, elementary students get overflowed to schools around the district as classrooms fill. Enrollment in grades K–3 is capped at 20 students, while fourth and fifth grade class sizes can top 25. While school Z reports 84% of its population is low income, no student is reported as a migrant. The average daily attendance rate remains consistent with the district average.

This study included 77 students and 20 staff members in 2016–2017 and 96 students and 15 staff members in 2018–2019. The population of School Z includes grades K–5 students (**Table 2**). School Z employs 12 itinerant staff members. Itinerant staff member titles are the occupational therapist, child study team, physical therapist, speech therapist, gifted and talented, physical education, art, music, orchestra, and library teachers. These professionals provide services to two or more district schools.

School Z is a neighborhood school. Students are not bussed but walk daily. Daily communication with parents is highly encouraged by the school’s administration. The staff of School Z is stable and reflects a low turnover rate. Within the period of School Z analysis, the overall student population consistently remained between 230 and 250 students annually, more than 82% economically disadvantaged, and 36% reporting a home language other than English. In 2017, 7.7% of students who completed the survey stated that they were new to School Z. In 2019, 7.3% of students who completed the survey stated that they were new to School Z.

The staff is not representative of the student population (Table 10). While the student population of School Z is of African and Spanish-speaking descent. To unite the cultural divide, it is particularly necessary to provide structured opportunities for rapport and community building.

**Table 10.**

*School Z Teachers*

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	12.5
Female	87.5
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
White	75
Hispanic	6
Black or African American	6
Asian	12.5



A quantitative correlational research design was utilized for this study to examine the impact on these two alternate disciplinary techniques on school climate and student behavior within a K–5 Title I elementary school. Findings from this study did not indicate a correlation between the use of these strategies and an improved school climate and student behavior.

### **Research Question 1**

The researcher used data collection tools to measure school climate. The question the researcher sought to answer was: What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate in a K–5 Title I school?

Character education programs within schools seek to create a comprehensive community of highly ethical, caring, and respectful students, staff, and parents who are intensely focused on social emotional learning. Character.Org is a national organization that supports schools in their effort to attain this goal. Character.Org is based in Washington DC; they strive to provide leadership, voice, and resources to help individuals and groups along their character journey (Character.org, 2019). The organization’s vision is to inspire and empower ethical, engaged, and compassionate citizens worldwide. Character.Org assessed School Z on two occasions utilizing the same rubric of 11 principles (**Tables 11** and **12**). The results demonstrated statistically significant improvement in all 11 areas between January 2018 and January 2019. The likelihood of the School Z score increasing in each of the 11 parameters by chance is unlikely. The probability of improvement in all 11 areas was 0.000488. This P value is low. In examining the difference between 2018 and 2019 Character.Org School Z assessment, a significant statistical change is indicated, as all 11 areas assessed increased.

**Table 11.***School Z Analysis by Character.Org*

<b>11 Principles</b>	<b>Character.Org January 2018 Score</b>	<b>Character.Org January 2019 Score</b>
School community promotes core ethical and performance values	2.67	3.33
School defines character as including thinking, feeling, doing	2.67	3.67
Comprehensive, intentional, proactive approach	2.25	3.67
Creating a caring community	2.25	4
Opportunities for moral action	2	3
Meaningful, challenging academic curriculum that respects all, develops character, and helps them succeed	2.67	3
Fosters student's self-motivation	2.5	3
Staff is ethical learning community; shares responsibility for character education and adheres to core values themselves	3	3.33
Shared moral leadership and long-range support	3	3
Family and community as partners	2.67	3.33
Assesses character of school, staff, and students	2	3

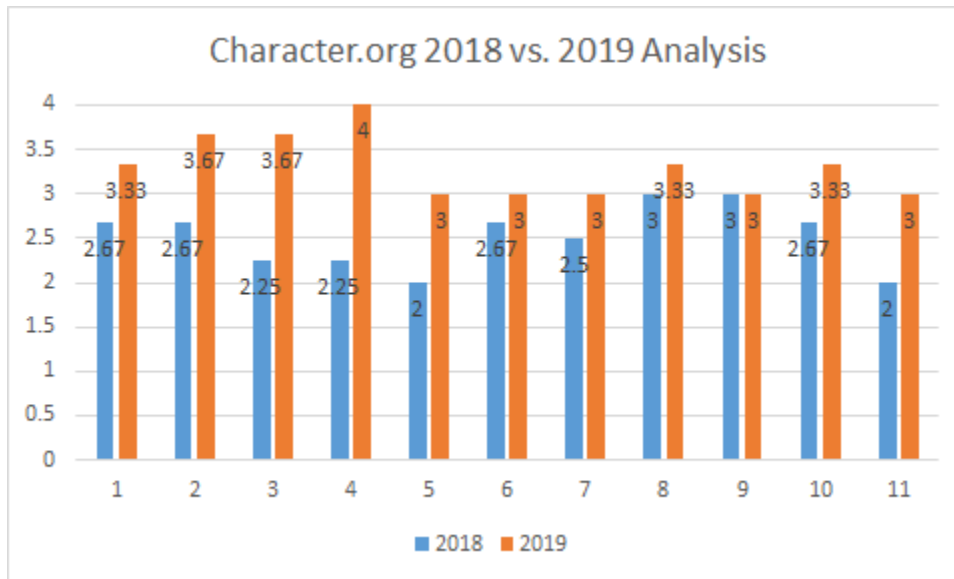
**Table 12.***School Z Statistical Analysis: t Test: Paired Two Sample for Means*

<b>Statistical Variable</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Mean	2.516363636	3.302727
Variance	0.123765455	0.121642
Observations	11	11
Pearson correlation	-0.065926276	
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
Df	10	
<i>t</i> Stat	-5.099328253	
P (T ≤ t) one-tail	0.000232241	
<i>t</i> Critical one-tail	1.812461123	
P (T ≤ <i>t</i> ) two-tail	0.000464482	
<i>t</i> Critical two-tail	2.228138852	

A matched-pair *t* test was used for this analysis because numbers were compared, not categories. The means are the same. The null hypothesis is that no significant change would be indicated by the 2018 and 2019 Character.Org School Z analysis. This matched-pair *t* test demonstrated that the mean Character.Org scores showed a statistically significant increase from 2018 to 2019, after the implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom.

Evidence that change has occurred across different domains has been presented to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis (**Figure 2**).

**Figure 2. Character.Org 2018 vs. 2019 School Z Analysis**



The questions included in the New Jersey School Climate Survey (**Appendix B**) offer insight into multiple aspects of school function. The New Jersey School Climate Survey was selected for this action research dissertation because it is a consistent collection tool utilized within grades 3–5 annually. The School Z district students, parents, and staff are well acquainted with its format and question presentation. The chi-square method was utilized to measure the difference between 2017 and 2019 categories.

Based on the observed New Jersey School Climate Survey data, the researcher does not have evidence that a statistically significant change occurred between 2017 and 2019 as a result of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom within School Z. The chi-squared statistic was used to measure the categories “Almost Always,” “Sometimes,”

and “Almost Never.” The researcher’s chi-square statistic is miniscule for all survey questions. It does not surpass one on any student or staff response comparison. The null hypothesis of the chi-square test is that no relationship exists on the categorical variables in the population; the variables are independent (Tables 13, 14, and 15).

**Table 13.**

*Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Student Question 1*

Response	Expected Survey Results (Assumes Homogeneity)		Observed Survey Results	
	2017	2019	2017	2019
Almost never	14	10	13.25581395	10.74418605
Sometimes	57	40	53.5755814	43.4244186
Always	24	27	28.16860465	22.83139535
<b>Chi-square test statistic, degrees of freedom = 2</b>			<b>0.375261122</b>	
<b>Chi-square P Value</b>			<b>0.828920887</b>	

H<sub>0</sub>: The proportions of School Z students who responded “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” “Almost Always,” to survey question 1 “I like coming to school” is unchanged from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are the same in the two surveys; they are homogeneous.

H<sub>a</sub>: The proportions of School Z students who answered “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” “Almost Always,” to survey question 1 “I like coming to school” changed from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are not the same in the two surveys; they are heterogeneous).

Since  $p > \alpha$ , the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. We cannot conclude that the proportion of students who like coming to school changed between 2017 and 2019.

**Table 14.**

*Chi Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Staff Question 2*

Response	Expected Survey Results (Assumes Homogeneity)		Observed Survey Results	
	2017	2019	2017	2019
Never	7	2	4.909091	4.090909
Sometimes	8	4	6.545455	5.454545
Often	3	8	6	5
Always	0	1	0.545455	0.454545
<b>Chi-square test statistic, degrees of freedom = 2</b>			<b>0.066661</b>	
<b>Chi-square P Value</b>			<b>0.995513</b>	

H<sub>0</sub>: The proportions of School Z staff who responded “Never,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always” to the statement “The school environment is in good condition” is unchanged 2017 to 2019. The proportions are the same in the two surveys; they are homogeneous.

H<sub>a</sub>: The proportions of School Z staff who answered “Never,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always,” to the statement “The school environment is in good condition” changed from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are not the same in the two surveys; they are heterogeneous.

Since  $p > \alpha$ , the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. We cannot conclude that the proportion of School Z staff who think the school environment is in good condition changed between 2017 and 2019.

**Table 15.**

*Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Student Question 14*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Expected Survey Results (Assumes Homogeneity)</b>		<b>Observed Survey Results</b>	
	<b>2017</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2019</b>
Almost never	10	4	7.732558	6.267442
Sometimes	52	42	53.57558	43.42442
Almost always	30	31	33.69186	27.30814
<b>Chi-square test statistic, degrees of freedom = 2</b>			<b>0.290332</b>	
<b>Chi-square P Value</b>			<b>0.864879</b>	

H<sub>0</sub>: The proportions of School Z students who responded “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” and “Almost Always,” to survey question 14 “Students at my school help each other when needed” is

unchanged from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are the same in the two surveys; they are homogeneous.

$H_a$ : The proportions of School Z students who answered “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” and “Almost Always,” to survey question 14 “Students at my school help each other when needed” changed from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are not the same in the two surveys; they are heterogeneous.

Since  $p > \alpha$ , the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. We cannot conclude that the proportion of students at School Z who help each other when needed changed between 2017 and 2019.

## **Research Question 2**

The researcher used data collection tools to measure student behavior. The question the researcher sought to answer was: What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on student behavior in a K–5 Title I school?



**Table 16.***School Z Out-of-School Suspension Data Chart*

---

<b>Statistical Variable</b>	<b>2016–2017</b>	<b>2018–2019</b>
School Z suspension rate	14	8
Two-proportion $z$ test		
$Z$	1.1	-1.3
Two-tailed $P$	0.27	0.1878
One-proportion $z$ -interval		<b>0.00974, 0.03707</b>

---

This two-proportion  $z$  test does not present a statistically relevant change but demonstrates that the school has moved in a positive direction because out-of-school suspensions have decreased.

**Table 17.***Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Staff Question 10*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Expected Survey Results (Assumes Homogeneity)</b>		<b>Observed Survey Results</b>	
	<b>2017</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2019</b>
Never	3	0	1.636364	1.363636
Sometimes	6	4	5.454545	4.545455
Often	7	9	8.727273	7.272727
Always	2	2	2.181818	1.818182
<b>Chi-square test statistic, degrees of freedom = 2</b>			<b>0.333238</b>	
<b>Chi-square P Value</b>			<b>0.953661</b>	

H<sub>0</sub>: The proportions of School Z staff who responded “Never,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always” to the statement “I spend a great deal of time redirecting student behavior” is unchanged 2017 to 2019. The proportions are the same in the two surveys; they are homogeneous.

H<sub>a</sub>: The proportions of School Z staff who answered “Never,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always” to the statement “I spend a great deal of time redirecting student behavior” changed from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are not the same in the two surveys; they are heterogeneous.

Since  $p > \alpha$ , the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. We cannot conclude that the proportion of School Z staff who spend a great deal of time redirecting student behavior changed between 2017 and 2019.

## **Summary**

While the New Jersey School Climate Survey, school suspension, and attendance results did not yield a statistically significant improvement between 2017 and 2019, the overall the values remained statistically consistent. A statistically relevant improvement within School Z was demonstrated by the Character.Org data. According to the Learning Policy Institute, the most successful schools are intentionally organized, with policies and structures in place to facilitate all areas of student learning, thereby empowering educators with the flexibility, support, and opportunities to implement practices and strategies that are tailored to the unique needs of students (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). School Z has been intentionally organized with the implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom.

The joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom within School Z is in its infancy. With the hiring of a new superintendent and the introduction of new school board members in 2017, 2018, and 2019, a districtwide commitment to restorative practices and Responsive Classroom has been made. Responsive Classroom was presented as a schoolwide initiative within School Z in 2016. Morning meetings were modeled and presented within classrooms by the school culture climate specialist. Restorative practices were introduced in 2017. The restorative philosophy and strategy of circles were explained and modeled by the school administrator and later the school culture climate specialist. No circles were held within School Z during the 2016–2017 school year. A dozen circles were held in the 2017–2018 school

year, facilitated by the school administrator, school culture climate specialist, and guidance counselor. In 2018–2019, 25 restorative circles were facilitated by teachers, a guidance counselor, a culture climate specialist, and a school administrator.

In 2018–2019, the district modified the K–5 bell schedule to include a 20-minute dedicated time period for Responsive Classroom morning meetings, and school funds were approved for the purchase of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom resources, staff certifications, and staff workshops. The School Z district Code of Conduct is scheduled to be rewritten in 2020 and will include restorative practices as a philosophy and administrative strategy. The updated 2019–2020 Syracuse City School District Code of Conduct specifies that student discipline and support policies and practices must be implemented in ways that are accountable and restorative. The 36-school Syracuse, New York public school district used to have one of the highest out-of-school suspension rates in the country. In 2012–2013, the New York Attorney General reported that 30%, or 22,929, Syracuse students were suspended throughout the school year. A restorative justice expert was hired to train teachers and staff on alternatives to suspensions and preventative practices. By 2015–2016, Syracuse reduced the number of annual suspensions by more than half to 10,377 (McMahon, 2019).

Four School Z district administrators have been certified as restorative practices trainers, and time is being provided for administration, guidance counselor, and teacher training. Finally, the structure of the high school in-school suspension room has shifted, as room monitors are expected to create a restorative climate for the students. This means that circles, reflection sheets, and restorative conferences are being held in lieu of silent detention.

Research shows that when schools and districts focus on improving school climate, students are more likely to be engaged, to develop positive relationships with each other and

adults, and to demonstrate positive behaviors (American Institutes for Research/US Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2017). Based on the 2017–2019 New Jersey School Climate Survey comparison, effort toward school climate improvement must continue in this area (Table 18).

**Table 18.**

*Chi-Square Test for Homogeneity of Proportions: Student Question 33*

Response	Expected Survey Results (Assumes Homogeneity)		Observed Survey Results	
	2017	2019	2017	2019
Almost never	4	6	5.523256	4.476744
Sometimes	42	20	34.24419	27.75581
Almost always	49	51	55.23256	44.76744
<b>Chi-square test statistic, degrees of freedom = 2</b>			<b>0.040091</b>	
<b>Chi-square P Value</b>			<b>0.980154</b>	

H<sub>0</sub>: The proportions of School Z students who responded “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” and “Almost Always” to survey question 33, “The people who work at my school show that they care about me,” is unchanged from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are the same in the two surveys; they are homogeneous.

H<sub>a</sub>: The proportions of School Z students who answered “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” and “Almost Always” to survey question 33, “The people who work at my school show that they care

about me,” changed from 2017 to 2019. The proportions are not the same in the two surveys; they are heterogeneous.

Since  $p > \alpha$ , the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. We cannot conclude that the proportion of students who believe the people who work at School Z care about them changed between 2017 and 2019.

### **Summary of Results**

While the researcher saw remarkable consistency throughout this data collection and analysis process, the researcher does not have evidence that student behavior or the school’s climate changed between 2017 and 2019 in School Z as a result of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. The null hypothesis is that there is no statistical relationship between perceptions of the extent of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate and student behavior within a Title I K–5 elementary school. The researcher examined student perception of school staff and school climate (Table 19). The student’s feedback on their school experience guided program implementation and program development within School Z.

**Table 19.***NJ School Climate Student Survey: 3 Student Questions*

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>2016–2017 Response, %</b>	<b>2018–2019 Response, %</b>
The people who work at my school show that they care about me		
Almost never	7.8	5.1
Sometimes	26.3	47.4
Almost always	65.5	47.4
I feel welcome at this school		
Almost never	16.9	3
Sometimes	26	41
Almost always	57.1	55
Overall, I feel safe at this school		
Almost never	1.3	5.2
Sometimes	20.8	26
Almost always	77.9	65

A low school average attendance rate could also result from a poor school climate (**Table 20**). Schools that effectively support their students create a learning culture and climate that are

both responsive to the changing needs of the individual and offer the kinds of stimulation that will propel continued positive growth (Eccles et al., 1993).

New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8) requires each school district to maintain the New Jersey School Register. The purpose of the school register is to record each student’s participation in an approved program of instruction to verify that the student attends the required number of days for promotion each year and eventually meets the requirement for graduation. (2018, para. 4)

While the average daily attendance rate for School Z increased between 2016–2017 when the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom began and 2018–2019, growth was miniscule and did not present statistically significant growth.

**Table 20.**

*Average Daily Attendance, School Z*

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Average Daily Attendance, %</b>
2016–2017	96.3
2016–2017	95.5
2018–2019	96.6
2018–2019	96.5

Of the 2,517 public schools in New Jersey, 2,000 are elementary schools. Statewide, the median rate of chronic absenteeism in the 2016–2017 school year was 7%, with elementary



school students least likely to be chronically absent. Overall, 31 percent of New Jersey schools reported chronic absenteeism rates above 10% (Clark & Astudillo, 2019).

## **Chapter Summary**

Social and emotional learning is important to enable individuals to learn to understand and manage their emotions and relationships, and to make good decisions (US Department of Education, 2013). The five domains within restorative practices promote better learning. Restorative practices were selected for School Z because the method intends to teach appropriate behavioral response, conflict resolution, and personal accountability, and in a K–5 elementary school, this is our primary purpose, to teach and not punish (**Table 7**). When an elementary student decides to behave in an inappropriate manner, an opportunity to discuss alternate responses arise. The student should reflect on their behavior and decide other ways the situation could have been handled. Teachers, administrators, and parents can help facilitate this conversation. Educators across the nation recognize the importance of fostering positive, healthy school climates and helping students learn from their mistakes (Schott Foundation, 2014).

A 2016 study of Denver, one of the first public school systems to restructure their code of conduct, showed 180 schools with 90,546 students implemented restorative interventions in response to disciplinary infractions. The findings showed that students who participated in restorative interventions during the first semester had less likelihood of receiving an office referral or out-of-school suspension in the second semester (Anyon et al., 2016).

The four domains of Responsive Classroom promote better instruction, self-expression, and community-building. Responsive Classroom is a student-centered, social, and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline. It is composed of a set of research and evidence-

based practices designed to create safe, joyful, and engaging classroom and school communities for both students and teachers (Center for Responsive Schools, 2019). Together, restorative practices and Responsive Classroom provide a strong foundation for an academic setting such as a K–5 Title I elementary school.

**Table 21.***NJ School Climate Student Survey: School Climate Questions*

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>2016–2017 Response, %</b>	<b>2018–2019 Response, %</b>
Students at this school are teased in a hurtful way		
Almost never	15.6	19
Sometimes	20.8	26
Almost always	33.8	17.5
I don't know	29.8	37.5
Bullying happens in my school		
Almost never	36.4	20.6
Sometimes	19.5	28.2
Almost always	32.5	9.7
I don't know	11.6	40.8
My principal helps me when I have a problem		
Almost never	16.9	12.8
Sometimes	29.9	29.4
Almost always	53.2	57.6

School Z data did not present a statistical regression in school climate or increase in negative student behavior. The “I don’t know” responses can be interpreted as the student responder is not personally experiencing maltreatment and is unaware of the experience of their peers. Because the “I don’t know” response does not concisely indicate a positive or negative experience, the response was not considered in the statistical analysis. All analyzed areas indicated that effort must continue to improve student behavior and school climate in School Z. The goal in continuing these efforts would be to see a statistical improvement on student and staff survey responses. Dichotomous questions could be posed in future research to clarify responses.

The scope of district support of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom throughout all schools continues to broaden. This centralized support enhances student, staff, and family understanding of the strategies, schoolwide goals, and teacher expectations. For these reasons, the researcher will continue to jointly implement restorative practices and Responsive Classroom within School Z. Implications for further research include inquiry into other contexts such as the student code of conduct, the role and impact of a school culture climate specialist, and the role of student programming on student behavior and school climate.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of this qualitative research. The research questions are restated, a summary presented, and connected to the research presented in Chapter 2.

Recommendations are made and limitations identified for practice and for future studies that could benefit education.

As the researcher's journey within this action research began, the first strategy was quiet, concentrated self-reflection. The researcher had to concisely identify a network of professional support, interests, resources, and level of commitment to any goal established. The action research had to be personal, as the researcher had to become fully invested in its development and quest to become a change agent. An interview with the outgoing principal was held in spring 2017, school staff were consulted in summer 2017, and building assessments were completed by the school staff, school stakeholders, and students in grades 3, 4, and 5 throughout 2017–2018 to identify the needs of the school.

The areas of school climate that were identified to be in need of attention were: attendance, student involvement, teacher morale, office referrals, Intervention and Referral Services, student suspension, and reports of HIB. The word repeated throughout this assessment process was “consistency.” One professional obstacle presented within the 2017–2018 school year, in direct contrast to the 2016–2017 school year, was the removal of part-time lunchroom and playground aides. This reduction of staff removed the opportunity for homeroom teachers to facilitate student clubs, extra help work sessions, and student support groups. Conversely, classroom teachers now had the opportunity to further their rapport with students during

lunchroom and recess duty. While not an intended focus of this action research, this staffing change has reduced the number of negative lunchroom and playground student interactions at School Z a benefit to achieving a positive school climate.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this action research was to determine whether the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom impacted student behavior and school climate within a K–5 Title I school. The survey questions used within this research were from the New Jersey Department of Education School Climate Survey. Survey data were collected from students in grades 3, 4, and 5, in addition to school staff. While this survey did not yield statistical evidence of improvement between 2017–2019 in School Z, it did not demonstrate a regression. The Character.Org school analysis conducted in 2019 presented statistical evidence of improvement from their first school assessment in 2018. The probability of improvement in all eleven categories is unlikely, therefore School Z has experienced positive growth in some areas. While the number of student suspensions decreased and the average daily attendance rate increased, their values were not statistically significant. Moving forward, consistency will be essential to grow the efforts and programs introduced to School Z in 2017.

Elementary schools bear the great societal responsibility of nurturing young children, keeping them safe, creating life-long learners, presenting data to demonstrate academic growth, encourage friendships and kindness, and fully partner and collaborate with parents and families. The magnitude of these requirements, compounded by the prospect of a school’s potential failure to fully develop each student, would necessitate that a school implement a structured organizational protocol, instead of utilizing inconsistent methods to engage and nurture its

students. An improved organizational structure includes an emphasis on the individuals who fill roles within the school, not just job titles and descriptions.

Restorative practices were selected for School Z because the method intends to teach appropriate behavioral response, conflict resolution, and personal accountability; in a K–5 elementary school, this is the primary purpose. Denver Public School District, the largest district in Colorado with 200 schools, 11,000 teachers, and 90,000 students, was one of the first districts to identify the overuse of out-of-school suspension and disparities in discipline to seek an alternate method of response in 2007. Similar to School Z, Denver Public School District has a high free and reduced lunch rate of 67.3%. In 2008, Denver Public Schools had 185 expulsions, by 2016, the district reported 33. Researchers have helped build stronger school cultures and safer schools with the focus on ensuring that students learn from their mistakes and make whole those they have harmed (Children’s Defense Fund, 2016). The discipline reform consists of restorative approaches, de-escalation strategies, and school culture. The district currently employs four professionals, specifically dedicated to proactive disciplinary measures:

- A trauma-informed and restorative practices manager
- Equity in student discipline program managers (K–5 and 6–12)
- Student equity and opportunity program manager

Their goal is to reduce suspensions and discipline in a restorative, learning manner, not punishment.

Responsive Classroom is a student-centered, social, and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline. It comprises a research and evidence-based practices designed to create safe, joyful, and engaging classroom and school communities for both students and teachers (Center for Responsive Schools, 2019). Restorative practices and Responsive Classroom

provided School Z with common language, a schoolwide focus, clear student expectations, and engaged students as an integral component of achieving a positive school climate and demonstrating positive behavior.

To address student involvement and student voice, multiple opportunities were created in 2017–2018:

- Restorative circles were introduced to and used by the staff and student body
- The strategies within restorative practices and Responsive Classroom were aligned for the staff and modeled by the guidance counselor, culture/climate specialist, and principal
- Teachers participated in restorative practices and Responsive Classroom article studies, work groups, and professional development
- Grade 3, 4, and 5 student leadership groups were facilitated by the school guidance counselor, Title I coach, and culture/climate specialist
- A student advisory committee was facilitated by the principal
- A dance team was facilitated by the culture/climate specialist
- A grade 5 school safety focus group was facilitated by the principal
- A garden club facilitated by grade 3 teachers
- Grade 5 participated in the Protocol School workshops

The advisor of the school safety patrol continued to facilitate this student opportunity for grade 4 and 5 students.

This researcher also sought to empower staff by introducing monthly, teacher-led, working faculty meetings featuring mini professional workshops. Teacher-chaired committees were developed in support of building goals, and release time was provided throughout the



school year to foster vertical and horizontal professional articulation. Peer observations were mandatory annually between 2017–2019. The purpose of in-school, in-district, and out-of-district peer observations was to build a professional community, enhance classroom instruction, and develop teacher leaders. In 2018–2019, the district, K–5 school schedule included 20 minutes dedicated to daily morning meetings. With this increased classroom use of Responsive Classroom, additional printed and video resources, professional development workshops, and observation time was provided to teachers. To ensure ongoing, current communication with the staff, a weekly email was distributed that included current events in K–5 education, classroom resources, and school-specific information.

With these initiatives, both students and staff became highly involved the daily function of School Z. Students guided each other through conflicts and issues that they deemed important within the school. Students learned that they could not complain, but had to problem-solve and improve their communication skills. Staff embraced the working model of collaboration, positive talk, and actively teaching School Z students to listen, express themselves, and take responsibility for their actions. Guided by the expectation of respect throughout School Z, the community worked together to create a school climate that was proactive in developing opportunities that supported both students and staff.

### **Research Questions**

Inquiry into improved student behavior and school climate was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate in a K–5 Title I school?

2. What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on student behavior in a K–5 Title I school?

### **Summary of the Findings**

A summary of the findings for each research question follows.

#### *Research Question 1*

What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate in a K–5 Title I school?

The analysis of the data suggested that there was neither statistical growth nor regression within the 2-year assessed period of time. While the researcher saw remarkable consistency throughout this data collection and analysis process, the researcher not have evidence that change occurred between 2017 and 2019 in School Z as a result of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. The null hypothesis is that there is no statistical relationship between perceptions of the extent of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate within a Title I K–5 elementary school.

Effective principals recognize the potential they have to create a school environment where teachers thrive and students achieve in a safe and nurturing setting (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013). The National School Climate Council states that a positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society.

## *Research Question 2*

What is the effect of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on student behavior in a K–5 Title I school?

The analysis of the data suggested that there was neither statistical growth nor regression within the 2-year assessed period of time. While the researcher saw remarkable consistency throughout this data collection and analysis process, the researcher not have evidence that change occurred between 2017 and 2019 in School Z as a result of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. The null hypothesis is that there is no statistical relationship between the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on student behavior within a Title I K–5 elementary school. This study accepts the null hypothesis.

School discipline policies are ultimately the responsibility of the school principal; however, all school staff play a role in their effective development and implementation (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013). The National Association of School Psychologists also suggests the use of restorative practices seeks to build positive relationships within the school community and incorporates family involvement.

## **Central Question Discussion**

The central research question was: What impact do alternate disciplinary techniques have on school climate and student behavior in a K–5 title I elementary school? The school climate survey completed within this study did not present a statistical change in school climate or student behavior. The Character.Org school assessment demonstrated a marked improvement in all categories analyzed. School Z earned a perfect score of 4/4 in the creating a caring

community category. The Character Education Partnership expanded on the requirements of this principle by explaining:

The daily life of classrooms, as well as all other parts of the school environment (e.g. the corridors, cafeteria, playground, and school bus), must be imbued with core values such as concern and respect for others, responsibility, kindness, and fairness (Lickona et al., 2017, para. 12).

Responsive Classroom promotes four essential domains of teacher skills, one being positive community. According to the Center for Responsive Schools (2019), a positive community is defined by:

Effective teaching requires a classroom and school where every child feels safe, valued, and fully included in the learning community; where teachers and students share a common purpose along with regular routines and traditions that form a comforting underpinning for their days; and where a sense of joy envelops hard work. (The Responsive Classroom, 2019, para. 16).

School Z also approached perfection in the Character.Org category of taking a comprehensive, intentional, proactive approach to promoting the core values in all phases of school life with a score of 3.67/4. The six core values of School Z are respect, trustworthiness, perseverance, integrity, empathy, and responsibility. The Character Education Partnership expanded the requirements of this principle by explaining:

A comprehensive approach uses all aspects of schooling—the teacher’s example, the discipline policy, the academic curriculum, the instructional environment, relations with parents and so on—as opportunities for character development. (Lickona et al., 2017)

In the 2014 restorative practices educators guide, preventative programs and social emotional learning were highlighted:

Conflict resolution programs provide students with problem-solving and self-control skills. Because conflict resolution addresses and works to resolve the root causes of conflict, it helps prevent future incidents from occurring. Social emotional learning teaches skills such as recognizing and managing emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. (Schott Foundation, 2014, p. 5)

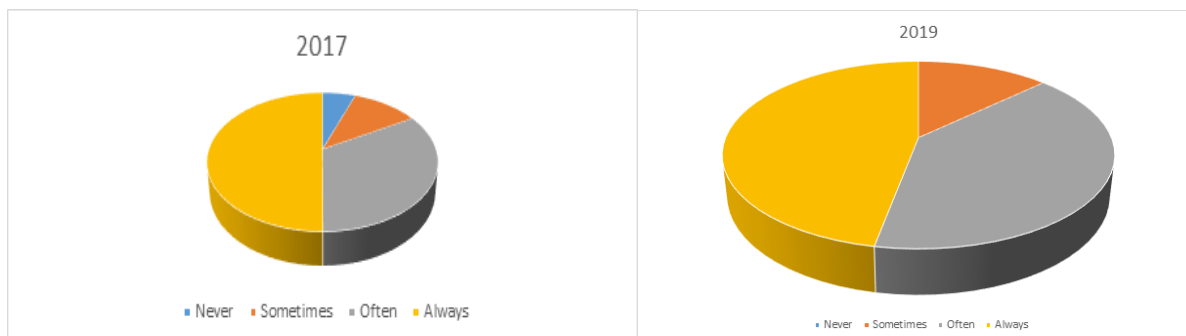
Based on the results presented in the 2017 and 2019 New Jersey School Climate Staff Survey, the building administrator is highly regarded by the staff. Responses indicated that the School Z staff sees the building administrator as being visible, supportive, and resourceful. In 2013, the National Association of Elementary School Principals collaborated in the preparation of a Framework for Safe and Successful Schools, “School leaders must mobilize the staff, students, parents, and community around the mission and shared values, as well as school improvement goals and set the parameters of high expectations for the school” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013, p. 4).

In 2019, the School Z staff indicated that they had opportunities to grow as educators within School Z, and they continued to seek additional opportunities for professional growth. While staff indicated that they enforce school policies, they also responded that students must improve in the area of consistent positive behavior. With the staff’s continued training, practice and implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom, consistent, positive student behavior could be achieved.

## Limitations

Limitations to this study involve the single placement of school analysis, small student and staff sample size, and the overall length of action research pre- and postanalysis. It would be difficult to generalize the findings in this study because of the small student and staff sample size. In 2017–2018, 77 students and 24 staff members responded. In 2018–2019, 96 students and 20 staff members responded. A conclusion to support the impact of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom on school climate and student behavior was not presented by the New Jersey School Climate Survey results. Intervening variables, such as the 2018–2019 teacher contract negotiations may have impacted survey results.

**Figure 3. NJ School Climate Staff Survey Question: I Feel Safe Inside My School**



**Table 22.**

*NJ School Climate Staff Survey Question: I Feel Safe Inside My School*

---

<b>Response</b>	<b>Year</b>	
	<b>2017, %</b>	<b>2019, %</b>
Never	5.5	0
Sometimes	11.1	13
Often	33.3	40
Always	50	47

---

The statistical change is insignificant, but the values demonstrate that School Z did not worsen within the 2-year study period. A 2007 study on high-quality school climate cites increasing school safety and improving interpersonal relationships by adopting violence prevention and conflict resolution programs (Loukas, 2007). Restorative practices recognize the significant role all education professionals play in maintaining a school community that models respectful, trusting, and caring relationships (Schott Foundation, 2014).

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Principals set high expectations and standards for academic, social, emotional, and physical development of all students. School discipline policies are ultimately the responsibility of the school principal (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013). This researcher

could have improved upon this action research by identifying a similar K–5 Title I elementary school without restorative practices or Responsive Classroom to compare outcomes. A longer period of program implementation analysis may yield a different statistical outcome based upon the consistency of program implementation and district support. Finally, a specific group of grade 3 students could be identified to monitor before, during, and after joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. Consistency in survey completion and school analysis would be achieved throughout a 3-year data collection period by selecting a group of grade 3 students in the initial year. Although the results of the New Jersey School Climate Survey did not demonstrate a statistical change, the researcher concedes that this may not have been the best instrument to assess the impact of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. To note, the data have not shown a statistical decrease.

Restorative practices provided School Z with an opportunity to use behavioral infractions as teachable moments, not punitive reactions. Restorative practices provided both staff and students with the expectation of positive behavior. Statements made to students and parents, the classroom constitutions developed each autumn by teachers and their students, and daily student/staff interactions were framed by proactive, positive actions. Show respect. Act responsibly. Be respectful. Be trustworthy. Show empathy. Demonstrate perseverance. Show integrity. These are the six core values and the six school rules. The overarching goal of the school—posted, repeated, and practiced—is to be kind. Suspension was rarely utilized as a consequence within this research period because the thought process of the students and staff shifted simultaneously. Staff established a rapport with both student and family, and the schoolwide message was clear: We do not fight at School Z. We are kind at School Z. We are respectful with our hands, words, and feet at School Z. A basic message jointly reiterated and



modeled by the entire school community drove the improvement effort in both student behavior and a positive school climate.

The sample size within this study was small. Future research should utilize several schools with common implementation strategies to study and also incorporate a control school(s) with students who have not had the benefit of restorative practices or Responsive Classroom utilization. This broad data set could yield a greater statistical significance. A future study could also follow the same cohort of students for a predetermined period of time, perhaps 3 years, instead of including a transient student population that may skew research results. In a longer action research project, this researcher could have partnered with another school district, perhaps one with longstanding use of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom and a second without either strategy. Research results could have been compared and trends noted.

This researcher utilized the New Jersey School Climate Survey to assess changes that may have occurred within School Z between the 2016–2017 and 2018–2019 school years. A qualitative component could have been added to this research collection to incorporate a descriptive and conceptual perspective. This researcher suggests the use of focus groups and interviews with students and staff. This researcher suggests the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to further assess the impact of the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom.

## **Implications**

Despite the lack of statistical improvement of School's Z effort to impact school climate and student behavior with the joint implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom, a positive shift in school climate and student behavior was noted by Character.Org as

School Z transitioned from an Emerging School of Character to a New Jersey School of Character, and ultimately to a National School of Character. Student suspensions continue to decline, and positive, proactive language is common schoolwide.

Between 2017 and 2019, School Z expanded opportunities for both students and staff to have a voice. A unified focus was placed on making the school experience better for both students and staff. The researcher was most effective in increasing the level of communication between administration, students, staff, and the community. The researcher was least effective in presenting a statistical improvement to improve school climate and student behavior in a 2-year period. Through this study, the researcher learned that change does not occur rapidly or without challenges. Intrinsic motivation and a desire to create a school home that nurtures its population gave the researcher the tenacity to persist in the presence of obstacles or negativity. Knowing that all decisions, purchases, strategy implementation, and hiring practices transpired with the goal of providing School Z students and the school community with the best gave further purpose to this action research.

The implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom will continue, and the capacity of school staff to serve as building leaders in these areas will increase. Community partnerships and collaborations must continue as we seek to improve school climate and student behavior. Methods to further engage our families are required for an effective partnership. Conducting a building review and implementation of the district strategic plan in its entirety, with particular attention to school climate strategies would support building goals. Working with the district safety committee to review, revise, and implement the student discipline/code of conduct policy will continue to guide student behavior improvement efforts.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

### *Recommendation 1*

The focus needs to be on sustained implementation of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom. Additional data collection will demonstrate any improvement in school climate and student behavior. Researchers must ensure full staff and student survey participation. Researchers may consider visitation of school districts where restorative practices if fully implemented K–12 and observe the Dean of Restorative Practices during student and staff training and circles. The Northeast Foundation for Children, creator of Responsive Classroom, offers national workshops within the annual Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Conference. An opportunity to attend this conference may support future building growth in this area.

### *Recommendation 2*

Continued professional development in the areas of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom are necessary to build capacity in faculty members and sustain teacher leadership. Restorative practices and Responsive Classroom should increasingly be incorporated in lesson plans, the bell schedule, and district code of conduct. Opportunities for families and stakeholders to have an active role in understanding and implementing restorative practices and Responsive Classroom should be developed by the building leader and supported by senior district administration. Modeling, hands-on practice, and formal training opportunities should be afforded to grade 5 students in order for them to lead circles.

In 2014, the Syracuse City School District revised their code of conduct to ensure a safe, civil, and caring environment. This document, titled, the Student Code of Conduct, Character, and Support, is updated annually and highlights five major changes:

- A greater emphasis on accountable and restorative interventions that will support students to improve their behavior and experience greater success at school
- A greater emphasis on promotion of positive social behaviors and prevention of discipline problems
- Differentiated responses to discipline problems for students in grades pre-K–5 and students in grades 6–12
- More precise descriptions of behavior concerns and violations aligned to levels of specific interventions and consequences
- More limited use of out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, and removal of students from the classroom

The 56-page document outlined the specific responsibilities each stakeholder group must fulfill as an integral member of the school community (Syracuse City School District, 2016).

### *Recommendation 3*

Restorative practices and Responsive Classroom are strategies that seek to build community by giving its members a meaningful voice and ensuring that they take responsibility for their actions. Restorative practices and Responsive Classroom have given School Z a common language and vision. Future researchers initiate and promote a proactive approach to student behavior and school climate. The utilization of positive school rules is one strategy. The

school rules of School Z incorporate the six core values, developed in support of restorative practices and Responsive Classroom.

In 2017, the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights announced that the number of suspensions and expulsions in the nation's public schools had dropped 20% between 2012–2014. According to a study conducted by Steinberg and Lacoë (2017):

In recent years, many policymakers and educators have called for the adoption of alternative disciplinary strategies that allow students to stay in school and not miss valuable learning time. Advocates for discipline reform contend that suspensions are meted out in a biased way, because minority students and those with disabilities receive a disproportionate share of them. Some also assert that reducing suspensions would improve school climate for all students. (p. 13)

As of May 2015, 22 states and the District of Columbia had revised their laws in order to require or encourage schools to:

1. Limit the use of exclusionary discipline practices;
2. Implement supportive (that is, nonpunitive) discipline strategies that rely on behavioral interventions; and
3. Provide support services such as counseling, dropout prevention, and guidance services for at risk students.

And as of the 2015–2016 school year, 23 of the 100 largest school districts nationwide had implemented policy reforms requiring nonpunitive discipline strategies and/or limits to the use of suspensions (US Office of Civil Rights, 2016).

### *Recommendation Four*

Utilize an alternate school climate survey such as:

1. The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory for students and staff. The CSCI assesses 13 dimensions of school climate in a Likert scale format. There is a \$1.75 fee per survey.
2. The Community and Youth Collaborative Institute (CAYCI) School Experiences Survey. This survey can be customized to the needs of the school and stakeholders.
3. Alliance for the Study of School Climate (ASSC) School Climate Assessment Instrument. This tool uses an analytic trait structure, not a Likert scale.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Upon analysis of your academic setting, how are current resources being utilized within your school and school district?
2. How are school stakeholders and community members engaged and encouraged to collaborate in school improvement efforts?
3. How do you identify your role in school improvement?

Addressing school climate is a unique undertaking and should be customized to the school population being impacted. Researchers and educators should evaluate the positives and the areas in need of improvement as initial analysis begins. Current stakeholders frequently possess untapped expertise and/or resources that could benefit the school community. Consider the ability to build capacity in current school professionals, which would allow time for the researcher to conduct other essential tasks. Permit school stakeholders to take an inventory of schoolwide opportunities, provide independent feedback, and make suggestions regarding new experiences. Researchers should approach school climate and student behavior with a team mentality, finding value in everyone's voice and holding stakeholders accountable for suggestions offered. In the end, those involved will develop a collective sense of responsibility for the outcome.

## USEFUL READINGS

- Costello, B., Wachtel, J., & Wachtel, T. (2009). *The restorative practices handbook: For teachers, disciplinarians, and administrators* (1st ed.). International Institute for Restorative Practices.
- Costello, B., Wachtel, J., & Wachtel, T. (2010). *Restorative circles in schools: Building community and enhancing learning*. International Institute for Restorative Practices.
- Haynes, N., Emmons, C., & Comer, J. (1993). *Elementary and middle school climate survey*. Yale University Child Study Center.
- Maynard, N. & Weinstein, B. (2019). *Hacking school discipline: 9 ways to create a culture of empathy and responsibility by using restorative justice*. Times 10 Publications.
- Northeast Foundation for Children. (2016). *The responsive classroom assessment tools for teachers* (2nd ed.). Center for Responsive Schools, Inc.
- Roser, S. (2012). *80 morning meeting ideas K–2 and 3–6*. Northeast Foundation For Children.
- Smith, D., Fisher, D., & Frey, N., (2015). *Better than carrots or sticks: Restorative practices for classroom management*. ASCD.
- Thorsborne, M. & Blood, P. (2013). *Implementing restorative practices in schools: A practical guide to transforming school communities*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.



## REFERENCES

- Acosta, J. D., Chinman, M., Ebener, P., Phillips, A., Xenakis, L., & Malone, P. S. (2016). A cluster-randomized trial of restorative practices: An illustration to spur high-quality research and evaluation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 26*(4), 413–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2016.1217488>
- Allen, K., Kern, M., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 30*(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>
- American Institutes for Research/US Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2017). *School Climate Improvement Action Guide for District Leaders*. Washington, DC. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/SCIRP/actionguidedistrictwhole.pdf>
- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008) *The Safe and Responsive Schools Project: A school reform model for implementing best practices in violence prevention*. (pp. 631–650)
- Amstutz, J. (2008). BYU-assisted national study shows cleanliness affects learning. <https://news.byu.edu/news/byu-assisted-national-study-shows-school-cleanliness-affects-learning>
- Amstutz, L. & Mullet, J. (2014). *The little book of restorative discipline for schools: Teaching responsibility; creating caring climates*. Good Books.
- Anyon, Y., Gregory, A., & Stone, S. (2016). Restorative interventions and school discipline sanctions in a large urban school district. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(6). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216675719>

Ashley, J. & Burke, K. (2009). *Implementing restorative justice: A guide for schools*. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Augustine, C., Engberg, J., Grimm, G., Lee, E., Wang, E., Christianson, K., & Joseph, A. (2018). *Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of the impact of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district*. RAND Corporation.

Bailie, J. W. (2012). *Power and authority in the student-instructor relationship in a restorative practices-based graduate program* [Doctoral dissertation, Lesley University].  
[https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/education\\_dissertations/49/](https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/education_dissertations/49/)

Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V. & Fox, J. (2014). Sent home and put off-track: the antecedents, disproportionalities, and consequences of being suspended in the ninth grade. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 5(2).  
<https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol5/iss2/13>

Boucaud, A. A. (2017). *A correlational study examining the relationship between restorative practices and school climate in selected elementary schools in a large mid-Atlantic urban school district* [Doctoral dissertation, Rider University]. Retrieved from ProQuest (2033461590).

Center for Responsive Schools. (2019). <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org>

Character.Org. (n.d.). <https://www.character.org/who-we-are/>

Children's Defense Fund. (2016). *Reforming discipline in Denver Public Schools: Three-pronged approach for equity & justice*. [https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Denver-Public-Schools-Profile\\_Final-PDF.pdf](https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Denver-Public-Schools-Profile_Final-PDF.pdf)

- Christenson, S. & Thurlow, M. (2004). School drop outs: prevention considerations, interventions, and challenges. *Psychological Science*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2004.01301010.x>
- Clark, A. & Astudillo, C. (2019). *New data shows how many kids missed too much school in every N.J. town*. NJ Advance Media. [https://www.nj.com/education/2017/04/see\\_how\\_many\\_kids\\_miss\\_too\\_much\\_school\\_in\\_every](https://www.nj.com/education/2017/04/see_how_many_kids_miss_too_much_school_in_every)
- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. (2013). *Preschool and elementary edition*. <https://casel.org/preschool-and-elementary-edition-casel-guide/>
- Costello, B., Wachtel, J., & Wachtel, T. (2009). *The restorative practices handbook: For teachers, disciplinarians, and administrators* (1st ed.). International Institute for Restorative Practices.
- Curwin, R. & Mendler, A. (1988). *Discipline with dignity*. ASCD.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educating-whole-child-report>
- De Nobile, J. (2015). School leadership practices that promote effective whole school behaviour management. *School Leadership & Management*, 36(4), 419–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2016.1247041>
- Eccles, J. S., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C. M., Reuman, D., Flanagan, C., & Iver, D. M. (1993). Development during adolescence. The impact of stage-environment fit on young adolescents' experiences in schools and in families. *The American Psychologist*, 48(2), 90–101. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.48.2.90>

- Eger, L., Egerová, D., & Pisonová, M. (2018). Assessment of school image. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 8(2), 97–122. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.546/>
- Elias, M. (2013). *The essential connection between a safe and secure school climate and students' educational and life success*. <https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/news-security-task-force-II-School-Climate.pdf>
- Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. No. 114-95, § 1112(b)(1)(D), 129 Stat. 1802 (2015). <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>
- Ferguson, C. (2012). *Does suspending students work?* <http://ideas.time.com/2012/12/05/does-suspending-students-work/>
- Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A. & Gerewitz, J. (2016). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 325–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2014.929950>
- Hammel, J. (2018). *The effects of restorative practices on student behavior* [Master's thesis, Goucher College]. <http://hdl.handle.net/11603/11006>
- Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2018). *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all*. Corwin Press.
- Harrison, L. (2007). From authoritarian to restorative schools. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 16(2), 17–20.
- Heilbrun, A., Cornell, D., Konold, T. (2017). Authoritative school climate and suspension rates in middle schools: Implications for reducing the racial disparity in school discipline, *Journal of School Violence*, 17(3), 324–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2017.1368395>

- Huang, F. & Cornell, D. (2018). The relationship of school climate with out-of-school suspensions. *Children and Youth Services Review, 94*, 378–389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.08.013>
- Jiang, Y., Perry, D. K., & Hesser, J. E. (2010). Suicide patterns and association with predictors among Rhode Island public high school students: A latent class analysis. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(9), 1701–1707. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.183483>
- Kline, D. M. S. (2016). Can restorative practices help to reduce disparities in school discipline data? A review of the literature. *Multicultural Perspectives, 18*(2), 97–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2016.1159099>
- Lickona, T., Schaps, E., & Lewis, C. (2017). 11 principles of effective character education. *Character Education Partnership*. <http://www.forcharacter.com/page12.html#P3>
- Loukas, A. (2007). What is school climate? High-quality school climate is advantageous for all students and may be particularly beneficial for at-risk students. *Leadership Compass, 5*(1).
- Luiselli, J., Putnam, R., Handler, M. & Feinberg, A. (2005). Whole-school positive behavior support: Effects on student discipline problems and academic performance. *Educational Psychology, 25*(2), 83–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341042000301265>
- Madhlangobe, L., & Gordon, S. (2012). Culturally responsive leadership in a diverse school: A case study of a high school leader. *NASSP Bulletin, 96*(3), 177–202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636512450909>
- McEvoy, A., & Welker, R. (2000). Antisocial behavior, academic failure, and school climate. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 8*(3), 130–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106342660000800301>

- McGiboney, G. W. (2016). *The psychology of school climate*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- McMahon, J. (2019). *Black students twice as likely to be suspended in Syracuse despite discipline overhaul*. [https://www.syracuse.com/schools/2017/01/black\\_students\\_twice\\_as\\_likely\\_to\\_be\\_suspended\\_in\\_syracuse\\_despite\\_discipline\\_ov.html](https://www.syracuse.com/schools/2017/01/black_students_twice_as_likely_to_be_suspended_in_syracuse_despite_discipline_ov.html)
- Mizell, H. (2010). *Why professional development matters*. [https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/why\\_pd\\_matters\\_web.pdf](https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/why_pd_matters_web.pdf)
- Mullet, J. (2014). Restorative discipline: From getting even to getting well. *Children & Schools*, 36(3), 157–162. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdu011>
- National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2007). <https://www.naesp.org/>
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2013). <https://www.nasponline.org/>
- National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments. (2017). <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-and-healthy-students/school-climate>
- National School Climate Center. (2014). <https://www.schoolclimate.org/themes/schoolclimate/assets/pdf/policy/school-climate-standards.pdf>
- National School Climate Center. (2019). <https://www.schoolclimate.org/>
- National School Climate Council. (n.d.). *What is school climate and why is it important?* <https://www.schoolclimate.org/school-climate>.
- New Jersey Administrative Code. (2018). N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8. <https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/register/register.pdf>
- New Jersey Climate Survey Summary. (2012). <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/SearchForSchool.aspx>  
<https://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/behavior/njscs/>

- New Jersey Department of Education. (2018). *Student safety and discipline in New Jersey public schools*. <https://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/vandv/1718/StudentSafetyDiscipline1718.pdf>
- Noddings, N. (2005). What does it mean to educate the whole child? *Educational Leadership*, 63(1), 8–13. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept05/vol63/num01/What-Does-It-Mean-to-Educate-the-Whole-Child%2%A2.aspx>
- Noltemeyer, A., Ward, R., & Mcloughlin, C. (2015). Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review*, 44(2), 224–240. <https://doi.org/10.17105/spr-14-0008.1>
- O’Dea, C. (2019). School report cards track police involvement in incidents. <https://www.njspolight.com/2019/03/19-03-20-2017-2018-school-reports-cards-track-police-involvement-in-student-problems/>
- Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources. (2019). <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaguidetoschoolclimate041019.pdf>
- Responsive Classroom. (2019). *What is responsive classroom*. <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>
- Rimm-Kaufman, S., Larsen, R., & Baroody, A., Curby, T. W., Ko, M., Thomas, J. B., Merritt, E. G., Abry, T., DeCoster, J. (2014). Efficacy of the responsive classroom approach: Results from a 3-year, longitudinal randomized controlled trial. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(3), 567–603. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214523821>
- School Safety and Security Manual: Best Practices Guidelines. (2006). <https://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/security/guidance/safetycenter.shtml>

- Schott Foundation. (2014). *Restorative practices: A guide for educators*.  
<http://schottfoundation.org/restorative-practices>
- Skiba, R., Horner, R., Chung, C., Rausch, M., May, S., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review, 40*(1), 85–107.
- Skiba, R. & Peterson, R. (1999). Are zero tolerance policies effective in schools? *American Psychologist, 63*(9), 852–862. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.9.852>
- Steinberg, M. & Lacoë, J. (2017). What do we know about school discipline reform? Assessing the alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. *Education Next, 17*(1), 44–52.
- Syracuse City School District (2016). *Code of conduct character and support*.  
<http://soundsupportsk12.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SCSD-Code-of-Conduct-FINAL.pdf>
- United States Secret Service & US Department of Education. (2016). *The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>
- US Department of Education. (n.d.). *National center on safe and supportive learning environments*. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment>
- US Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students. (2016). *Quick guide on making school climate improvements*. [https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/NCSSLE\\_SCIRP\\_QuickGuide508%20gdc.pdf](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/NCSSLE_SCIRP_QuickGuide508%20gdc.pdf)
- US Department of Education. (2013). *Guide for developing high-quality school emergency operations plans*. [https://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS\\_K-12\\_Guide\\_508.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf)



US Department of Health and Human Services, & US Department of Education. (2014). *Policy statement on expulsion and suspension policies in early childhood settings*.

<https://www.justice4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Quotes.pdf>

US Office of Civil Rights. (2012). Helping to ensure equal access to education.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/ocr/report-to-president-2009-12.pdf>

US Office of Civil Rights. (2016). School climate and safety.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf>

Wachtel, T. (2019). *Defining restorative*. <https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/>

Way, N., Reddy, R., & Rhodes, J. (2007). *Students' perceptions of school climate during the middle school years: Associations with trajectories of psychological and behavioral adjustment*. <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/student-percep-climate.pdf>

Wigmore, D. (2018). *The New Jersey Education Association Health and Safety Report*.

<https://www.njea.org/responding-to-school-related-violence/>

Williams R., Brien K., & LeBlanc J. (2012). Transforming schools into learning organizations: Supports and barriers to educational reform. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 134.

Wilson, D. (2009). The interface of school climate and school connectedness and relationships with aggression and victimization. *The Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 293–299.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08286.x>

Youth.gov. (n.d.). <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/school-climate/impact-of-school-climate>

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

**Supplemental Table 1.**

School Z Enrollment by Student Group

Student Group	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018
Female, %	46.9	46.1	48.8
Male, %	53.1	53.9	51.2
Economically disadvantaged, %	83.4	85.3	83.5
With disabilities, %	11.2	11.6	11.3
English learners, %	8.3	11.6	10.9
Homeless, %		0.4	0.8
Students in foster care, %		0.4	0.0
Military-connected, %		0.0	0.0
Migrant, %		0.0	0.4

NJ School Performance Report 2017–2018

**Supplemental Table 2.**

*2016–2017 National Suspension Rate by Race and Sex*

Observation	Data
Disproportionately high suspension/expulsion rates for students of color	Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. On average, 5% of white students are suspended, compared to 16% of black students. American Indian and Native-Alaskan students are also disproportionately suspended and expelled, representing <1% of the student population but 2% of out-of-school suspensions and 3% of expulsions.
Disproportionate suspensions of girls of color	While boys receive more than two out of three suspensions, black girls are suspended at higher rates (12%) than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys; American Indian and Native-Alaskan girls (7%) are suspended at higher rates than white boys (6%) or girls (2%).

United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Report (OCR) 2016–17

**Supplemental Table 3.***2016–2017 Researched School District Violence and Vandalism*

<b>Recorded Data</b>	<b>n</b>
District enrollment	11,530
Violence	89
Vandalism	19
Weapons	13
Substances	48
HIB	99
Total incidents, N	263

NJDOE Electronic Violence and Vandalism Report, 2016

**Supplemental Table 4.***2018–2019 School Z Demographics*

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Measured Data</b>
K–5 student population, n	245
K–5 teachers, n	12
Administrators, n	1
Teachers’ average experience, y	12.5
Student/teacher ratio	9:1
Economically disadvantaged students, %	85
Students with disabilities, %	12
English language learners, %	12
Black or African American, %	48.7
Hispanic, %	42.2

NJ School Performance Report 2017–2018

**Supplemental Table 5.***School Z Enrollment by Grade Over 3 School Years*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2015–2016</b>	<b>2016–2017</b>	<b>2017–2018</b>
Pre-K, n	0	0	0
K, n	40	41	40
1, n	39	38	36
2, n	42	36	35
3, n	33	41	44
4, n	41	36	48
5, n	46	40	45
Total, N	241	232	248

---

NJ School Performance Report 2017–2018

## **APPENDIX A**

### **New Jersey Department of Education Definitions**

#### **School Climate**

An enduring positive school climate and culture are essential conditions for fostering learning and positive youth development that results in productive and fulfilling lives. The NJDOE supports school efforts to assess, develop, and maintain positive school climates and cultures and other conditions that affect student learning and growth.

#### **Positive School Culture and Climate**

A school culture and climate that emphasizes positive, proactive, and preventive practices aligned to a student's sense of physical and emotional safety fostering optimal conditions for learning and includes:

- A clean, safe, welcoming and accessible physical environment;
- Assessment of school culture and climate using multiple sources (e.g., NJ School Climate Survey, indicator checklists, discipline data, etc.);
- School environments that have clearly defined and articulated expectations, transitions and routines;
- Instruction on social norms, relationship building, and behavioral expectations infused into curricula and daily routines;

- Regular activities that are planned specifically to foster positive school climate and community building;
- Communication between staff and administrators that is reciprocal and occurs frequently;
- Use of supportive behaviors (e.g., listening, helping, expressing caring, etc.) by staff toward students and toward each other;
- Ongoing student and staff recognition for positive contributions to the school community;
- Opportunities for student and staff input into planning and decision making (e.g., through feedback discussions, focus groups, surveys, etc.); and
- Use of scaffolds (e.g., visuals, coaching, teachable moments, pre-correction, etc.) to support positive choices by students.

School Climate Transformation Project Team (2018). New Jersey School Strategy Resource Guide. Retrieved from

<https://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/sandp/climate/SCTP%20Strategy%20Resource.pdf>

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Additional Sources**

New Jersey School Climate Survey

New Jersey School Climate Survey Administration Guide

New Jersey School Climate Survey—Elementary

New Jersey School Climate Survey Domain Scale Validation

## APPENDIX C

### New Jersey School Climate Survey Domains

---

<b>School Climate Domain</b>	<b>Description</b>
Relationships	This domain assesses the degree to which lines of interpersonal communication are open and honest and produce healthy, positive outcomes. This includes an assessment of the depth, sincerity, and authenticity of communications efforts. For students, this domain focuses on relationships between students and includes positive outcomes rather than negative, preventable outcomes, such as bullying, harassment, and intimidation. For parents, it includes the fairness of the administration of the school's academic and social environments.
Parental support and engagement	This domain is concerned with the degree to which parents and community members are incorporated into both the social and academic fabric of the school. This includes assessing the efficacy of school-home communications and an assessment of the degree of home support for learning, and for parents, the degree of satisfaction with the school.
Emotional environment	This domain addresses attitudes toward the social environment. This includes perceptions of how the average student ought to, and does, behave as well as the general fairness of the school. For parents, this domain is combined with safety.
Morale in the school community	This domain addresses "pride of place" as ownership and identification with the school's central character, as well as a call to all stakeholders for "belonging" to the school. For students and parents, by considering the school as a "common cause," this domain assesses the school leadership's ability to support and rally the school community to healthy and positive outcomes.
Safety	This domain addresses attitudes toward the individual's sense of physical safety in and around the school. For parents, it addresses attitudes toward physical safety and is combined with the emotional environment.

---

*Table continued on next page*



*Table continued from previous page*

---

<b>School Climate Domain</b>	<b>Description</b>
Teaching and learning	This domain focuses on the academic climate of the school and probes support for student development, levels of instructional challenge and relevance, and learning and personal pride in successfully achieving academic objectives by students of learning and teachers of teaching. It also includes general attitudinal measures of satisfaction with the school’s overall instructional quality.
Physical environment	This domain addresses scheduling, the use of the building, and attitudes toward the building.
Perception of administration support (staff only)	By considering the school as a “common cause,” this domain addresses the school leadership’s perceived ability to support and rally the school community to healthy and positive outcomes in terms of quality of communications, level of integrity, and ease of teamwork, as well as the promotion of professional and academic success.
Inclusion and diversity	This domain addresses attitudes towards the issues of diversity, inclusion, and respect of differences in others, as well as inclusive behavior, curricula, and communication practices.

---

NJSCS Administration Guide 2016