

Burlington School District Restorative Practices 2020-2021 Annual Report



Table of Contents

[Intent and Goals of this Report](#)

[Overview/Description of Restorative Practices within BSD](#)

[BSD Context Leading to RP Implementation](#)

[Yearly Key Milestones in RP Implementation](#)

[Funding Received to Further RP Implementation](#)

[BSD's Restorative Practices Teams and Objectives](#)

[RP Data Measures](#)

[Goals and Plans Moving Forward](#)

Intent and Goals of this Report

This report gives an overview of restorative practices (RP) within Burlington School District (BSD) since BSD began utilizing RP during the 2014-2015 school year. This report is the first of future annual RP reports and therefore covers a span of seven years (2014-2021). Future RP reports will be released in the spring of every school year.

Overview/Description of Restorative Practices within BSD

A whole school restorative approach offers practices that prioritize community and relationship building as a way to prevent harm. When harm does happen, RP leverages relationships to repair the harm and to support the growth needed of those involved for future success. Through fair process, RP attends equitably to the needs of those harmed and those who have done the harm. Successfully implemented, RP transforms schools into places where students and teachers work together to solve problems, celebrate and learn from differences, and create safe, inclusive, welcoming spaces for all. It is not a “program” but an approach that requires a shift in how we think about discipline, the power of relationship, and the negative impact of unexamined implicit biases.

RP is a means to work toward and achieve equity throughout BSD. Equal voice and engagement are core principles of RP. Inequity and oppression in our systems, spaces, and interactions prohibit authentic meaningful engagement and voice for all people. RP creates processes, structures, and time for the meaningful engagement that equity requires so that issues can be surfaced and changed.

The BSD RP Vision Statement summarizes the purpose of RP in BSD: *“Restorative Practices are rooted in building and rebuilding relationships to create a culture of equity and belonging that results in healing and learning. BSD, in partnership with the Burlington community, embraces Restorative Practices ensuring that all, including those who have been harmed, will have their needs and experiences recognized and acted upon, thus creating a supportive climate of empowerment for all.”*

Key goals to achieve this vision include:

- Build climate and culture of belonging and connectedness
- Promote equity and inclusion
- Eliminate exclusionary punitive practices and disproportionality related to identity factors
- Strategic implementation over time as readiness allows
- Build site RP capacity and leadership
- Address racism and implicit bias in disciplinary practices in our schools

BSD Context Leading to RP Implementation

In October 2010, the School Board established the Diversity and Equity Task Force. The group presented its findings in the [“Task Force Report on the Recommended Strategic Plan for](#)

[Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Burlington School District](#)” in October 2011. The report recommended improvements in four key areas: leadership, climate, curriculum, and human resources.

A protest by some New American students and their supporters alleging racism and discrimination in educational opportunities at BHS in April 2012 prompted the development of a diversity and equity plan, “Diversity – Our Gift and Our Future”, delivered in June 2012. The plan created four new district positions, including a Director of Equity. The plan also outlined specific steps to be taken to address disparities in academic achievement, climate issues, and hiring and retention. Additionally, the School Board created its own strategic plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion in October 2012.

Both the administration’s and the Board’s plans called for developing and publishing reports examining differences in outcomes for students by race, ethnicity, language background, socio-economic background, ability, and gender. Data reports beginning in 2012 highlighted the disparities in discipline in BSD. The data persistently showed that students of the global majority were suspended at higher rates than white students.

In November 2014, the Office of Diversity, Equity and Community Partnership released its Strategic Plan for Diversity and Equity which included the goal to ensure a welcoming, safe, inclusive, and equitable school community, with subgoal 1.2 tasking the Director of Equity with collaborating with the community restorative justice programs to implement RJ practices district-wide.

In January 2015, Vermont Legal Aid published *Kicked Out! Unfair & Unequal Discipline in Vermont’s Public Schools* by Jay Diaz, which confirmed that disproportionate discipline trends exist in Vermont as in the rest of the US. This furthered BSD’s desire to address these issues within the district.

In June 2015, the School Board’s subcommittee for Diversity and Equity developed goals for their committee at the Board’s retreat that included “supporting a district climate that fosters inclusion, equity, and peace, to be achieved through a restorative justice framework” (D&E Committee Minutes, July 21, 2015). The superintendent named the Director of Equity as district lead in developing a plan to implement restorative justice practices district-wide as a way to address district equity issues.

In 2017, BSD conducted a comprehensive needs assessment across all its schools and programs that confirmed that students who are suspended, or frequently absent, were disproportionately students of the global majority, students with disabilities, and/or students experiencing poverty. BSD’s implementation of RP district-wide is central to creating more inclusive, equitable, safe and respectful learning environments.

[Yearly Key Milestones in RP Implementation](#)

A detailed year by year overview of RP implementation in BSD can be found using the above hyperlink.

Funding Received to Further RP Implementation

BSD secured a grant in November 2020 from the Department and Children and Families (DCF) and is working in partnership with UP for Learning and the Burlington Community Justice Center with the goal of eliminating racial disparities in suspensions and punitive disciplinary practices in district schools. The goals of this grant are to establish a process for authentic youth engagement and to replace traditional disciplinary models with RP. As part of this work, BSD now has a Youth and Family Restorative Liaison position to help guide this work at the middle schools.

BSD's Restorative Practices Teams and Objectives

- 1) RP Evaluation Team Primary Objectives:
 - Guides process and outcome evaluation and assessment of the district's RP work.
 - Determines whether RP is leading to greater equity in creating desired changes to culture and climate, discipline referrals, attendance, and academic disparities.
- 2) RP Training Team Primary Objectives:
 - Builds more capacity to offer professional development among district employees and reduce reliance on outside district consultants.
 - Strategizes, designs and implements RP professional development (PD) for BSD.
- 3) RP Youth and Family Engagement Team Primary Objectives:
 - This team is developing their objectives as of the fall of 2021.
- 4) Restoring School Engagement Team Primary Objective:
 - Establish restorative processes to re-engage students and families struggling to attend school consistently
- 5) Reimagining Behavior Responses Team Primary Objective:
 - Creates systems in BSD so that demographics are no longer a predictor of involvement in discipline procedures and it is the norm to respond restoratively when behaviors that cause harm occur, whenever possible.

School/Department Based RP Committees/Teams: Each school/group (including Early Education, After School, and Central Office) has an RP Committee. Representatives from each team come together through the [Restorative Practices Collaborative](#) once a month to share about their practice, learn from one another, and support each site's work.

RP Data Measures

BSD collects data specific to RP implementation, use, and efficacy annually. Students and staff are surveyed yearly on their experience of RP to help district and site teams understand how RP implementation is going, what issues may be present, and to inform future RP PD. Data is used to measure progress on the two RP goals identified by Superintendent Flangan in the 2020-2021 Strategic Goals: “Our schools are restorative and equitable” and “Staff report increased use of restorative practices”. BSD is grateful to our UVM partners Drs. Bernice Garnett and Lance Smith for their work on RP evaluation in BSD.

1. RP Student Survey

2019 Student Demographics

- Administered to students in 3rd-12th grades
- Total responses: 2,267 students from 12 schools
- Grade: K-5: 39%, 6-8th: 23%, 9-12th: 32%
- Gender: He/Him: 47%, She/Her: 44%, Self-described: 2%, They/Them: 1%
- Race/Ethnicity: White: 50%, African: 4%, American Indian/Alaskan Native: 2.6%, Asian: 11%, Black/African-American 11%, Hispanic 2%, Multi 5%, Self-describe 7%

2019 Student Results: Selected Questions

- 79% of respondents had participated in a restorative practice circle in the past year
- 71% of respondents indicated their teachers “often/always” use circles as a time to share feelings
- 44% of respondents indicated that they “often/always” enjoyed their time in circles
- 67% of respondents indicated that they “often/always” felt safe/comfortable participating in circles
- 44% of respondents indicated that they “often/always” felt that their teachers treated them with respect if they misbehaved.

2020 Student Survey

- Due to Covid, we were not able to administer the 2020 BSD RP student survey

Conclusions from Student RP Survey Data

- Responses from students indicated a positive regard towards RP implementation, particularly the use of community-building classroom RP circles
- Students were making connections between social-emotional learning (SEL) and participating in RP circles
- RP principles have not yet penetrated and addressed systemic issues around equity and inclusion
 - This is identified for future RP PD and implementation considerations
- Carefully examine the perceptions of marginalized students in RP implementation and participation by disaggregating the data and examining these results

2. RP Adult Survey

2019 Staff Survey Demographics

- Administered to BSD staff in May 2019
- Total responses: 380 staff members from 14 schools/sites
- Professional roles from responses: (each category percent of the 380 respondents)
 - Administrator, Counselor, Afterschool: 5.6%
 - Non-classroom role: 10%
 - Paraprofessional: 22%
 - Teacher: 62%

2019 Staff Survey Results: Selected Questions

- 78% of respondents agree/strongly agree that implementing RP “positively impacted their professional growth”
- 71% of respondents agree/strongly agree that they feel “prepared to run proactive community building circles. The most common RP strategies being implemented by respondents are: restorative questions, community building circles, small impromptu conferences, and affective statements
- 80% of respondents agree/strongly agree that they feel supported by administrators to use RP
- 54% of respondents indicate they use circles as a time for students to share feelings while 22% indicate they do not at all or rarely do this.
- 34% of respondents indicate that they not at all or rarely use RP tools with students to explore issues of equity/inclusion

2020 Staff Survey Demographics

- Administered to BSD staff in May 2020
- Total responses: 443 staff members
- Professional roles from responses:

Teachers: 52% Paraprofessionals: 20% Administrators, counselors, after school: 28%

2020 Staff Survey Results: Selected Questions

- 79% of respondents agree or strongly agree that district trainings helped them learn about RP
- 79% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel confident in leading RP in their classroom and interactions with students
- 84% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel supported by administrators at their building or school when using RP practices.
- 57% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they have had sufficient training in RP
- 76% of respondents agree or strongly agree that RP is a priority in their school building
- 72% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they use RP tools with students to explore issues of identity, equity or inclusion

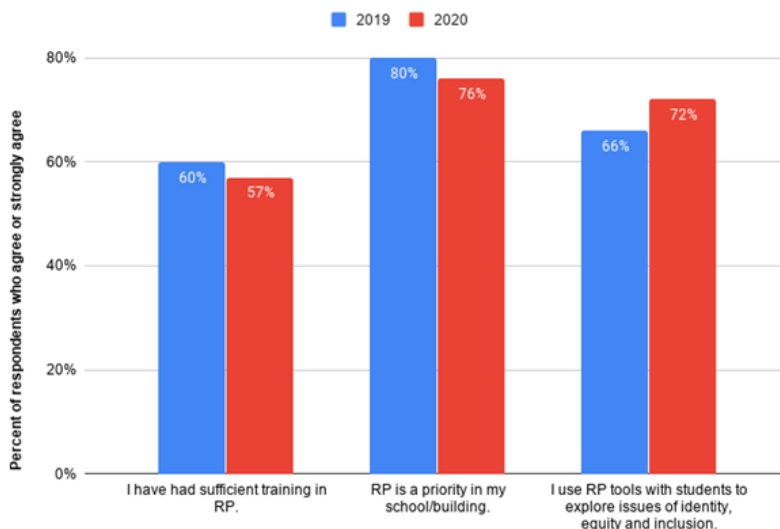
2020 Staff Survey Results: Additional Covid Specific Questions

- 64% of respondents indicated that RP community building circles are a helpful structure to maintain during remote learning
- 50% of respondents indicated that students appreciate participating in virtual circles.
- 36% of respondents indicated that they are using Tier 1 community building circles as part of their remote instruction
- Data suggests that foundational investment in RP prior to the abrupt transition online during the spring of 2020 assisted BSD staff and teachers in maintaining connections with students and eased the transition.

2019 and 2020 Staff Survey Results Compared

As detailed in the below chart, on average across the Burlington School District, the majority of BSD employees who responded indicate that RP is a priority in their school building and that they are using RP tools to address issues related to equity. RP training needs still remain across the district.

RP Adult Survey-- Three Question Overview for 2019 and 2020



2020-21 School Year Professional Development

- All school and department RP teams participated in Restorative Reentry PD to consider what thoughtful re-entry to the school year would include given the dual pandemics of Covid and racial discrimination.
- The Burlington Technical Center offered Foundations in RP PD (Tier 1) for all staff members who had not participated in this previously. They are the only school or department in which every staff member has had this training.
- The District RP Training Team is offering two one-credit online courses open to all district employees through Southern New Hampshire University. One class is on Foundations in RP (Tier 1) and one is on Restorative Responses to Harm (Tier 1.5). Educators are welcomed to take either or both and can also audit these courses at no cost.

Goals and Plans Moving Forward

BSD is dedicated to continuing the important work of advancing RP in all of our schools. We deeply believe that RP is a tool for equity, a transformative way of thinking, and is more than just a passing initiative. We are committed to honing our practice and building capacity among school leaders and staff. In the fall of 2020, Superintendent Tom Flanagan named RP as a priority in his 100-day entry plan. Additionally, the City of Burlington declared racism a public health emergency and collaborated with BSD to identify five concrete action steps to dismantle systemic racism. One action step is to *“fully implement restorative practices in all schools to create a more equitable behavioral response system to reduce suspensions and punitive disciplinary actions.”* Additionally, we have worked to build capacity within BSD to reduce reliance on outside consultants by creating systems for RP leadership in schools and guiding school-based RP committees.

As we progress in our dedication to RP there are many priorities throughout BSD that are in process simultaneously including:

- Supporting the RP committees within each school and department
- Administering an Equity Audit and a review of data systems to identify priorities and to inform the district’s five-year strategic planning process
- Continuing to collect and disseminate RP data from staff and students to examine the impact of RP and to provide targeted PD for sites
- Ensuring that Tier 1 RP processes focused on building relationships, community, and belonging are happening consistently and with fidelity district-wide for both adults and students
- Offering ongoing PD for Tier 1 RP and begin implementation of Tier 1.5 and Tier 2 PD
- Reimagining how responses to harmful incidents can happen in a restorative manner with students and adults (e.g., student-student, staff-student, staff-staff)
- School discipline reform that, in conjunction with AOE, will make recommendations to end suspensions and expulsions for all but the most serious student behaviors
- Utilizing the Department of Children and Family Grant to decrease inequitable disparities in suspensions and discipline at BSD by leveraging youth/adult partnerships and the district’s reconfigured RP Youth and Family Engagement Team.
- Partnering with Parent University to train parent RP facilitators
- Implementation of RP responses to Bullying, Hazing, and Harassment substantiated investigations
- Reimagining Student Support Centers to develop restorative responses to behavior referrals
- Further develop restorative reentry strategies to address the collective trauma, mental health needs, and isolation exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic
- Identify barriers to RP implementation and develop strategies to overcome them
- Integrate anti-racist work into RP through the use of Tier 1.5 and Tier 2 circles to process hate speech, discrimination, and bias in schools
- Partner with the Office of Equity to integrate RP into anti-racism initiatives