

# Building Capacity for Restorative Discipline in Texas

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An Evaluation of The Texas Schools Restorative  
Discipline Project

August 2018

This report is brought to you by:



The University of Texas at Austin  
**Texas Institute for  
Child & Family Wellbeing**  
*Steve Hicks School of Social Work*

#### Acknowledgements:

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## OVERVIEW OF THE RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

In the spring of 2015, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialog (IRJRD) at the UT School of Social Work began a partnership to train administrators and educators in school-based restorative practices. IRJRD caught the attention of TEA due to its demonstrated success in adapting restorative justice strategies for a school setting and implementing those strategies at a middle school identified with high disciplinary rates. The middle school was the first school in the state of Texas to pilot the Restorative Discipline approach and within two years the school saw improvements in school climate, disciplinary referrals, attendance and bullying. Based on the promise of the Restorative Discipline approach, TEA made a significant investment to provide statewide training to administrators, and district and campus-level educators in the Restorative Discipline practices developed by IRJRD.

IRJRD describes Restorative Discipline as “a relational approach to fostering school climate and addressing student behavior that prioritizes belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment.” IRJRD developed the evidenced-based Texas Model of Restorative Discipline curriculum to train educators on restorative practices in schools and has worked with a number of schools and districts. The partnership between TEA and IRJRD is the first in the nation to build statewide capacity for restorative practices in schools and demonstrates the state’s evolving commitment to building healthier and just school communities.

The statewide trainings were initially offered in ten of the twenty Educational Service Center Regions in Texas. The first ten regions were selected by TEA due to their high disciplinary and racial disproportionality rates. Once the initial ten sites were trained, the remaining ten ESC regions were added due to demand. The first regional training took place in June of 2015 and the last regional training was concluded in October of 2017. Two specific trainings were offered in each region. The Administrator Readiness training was a two-day introduction to Restorative Discipline (RD) and the Coordinator’s training was a more intensive 5-day training intending to develop restorative practice leaders for school implementation. In all, forty statewide trainings were provided in just over two years.

As the project progressed, the IRJRD contracted with the Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, also at the UT School of Social Work, to evaluate the implementation of Restorative Discipline in schools and districts across the state following participation in the RD trainings. The evaluation was based on an implementation survey sent out on a rolling basis to each site approximately six months and one-year of in-school time from each training. This report presents the cumulative findings related to implementation of RD from the participants of the twenty Restorative Discipline Administrator Readiness trainings and the twenty Restorative Discipline Coordinator’s trainings.

### Goals of the Restorative Discipline Project

The proposal for the Restorative Discipline project makes clear that the goal of the project is to build capacity in the state of Texas for the thoughtful implementation of RD practices in schools. As the very first state-wide training aimed at bringing RD practices to scale, it was a primary step in introducing RD practices to interested stakeholders and educators across the state.

RD success depends on the development of a school climate based on communication, mutual understanding and respect between all members of a school community. One of the hallmarks of this type of school-wide approach is that it takes time, typically three to five years before seeing significant changes in outcomes. Thus, while positive outcomes in areas including disciplinary action, student behavior, and academic achievement have been demonstrated in other school settings further along in implementation of restorative practices, it was not anticipated that significant student outcomes would be found at six months and at one-year post RD training. However, the two trainings provided by IRJRD in each ESC region were meant to promote readiness, instill knowledge and provide focus on the development of building blocks to allow schools to tailor

and customize RD to their campus in order to facilitate the desired whole-school climate change. Thus, the implementation evaluation explored the beginning trends in the use of RD strategies, the initial perceived impacts, and barriers in introducing RD practices to a campus.

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### Implementation Survey Development

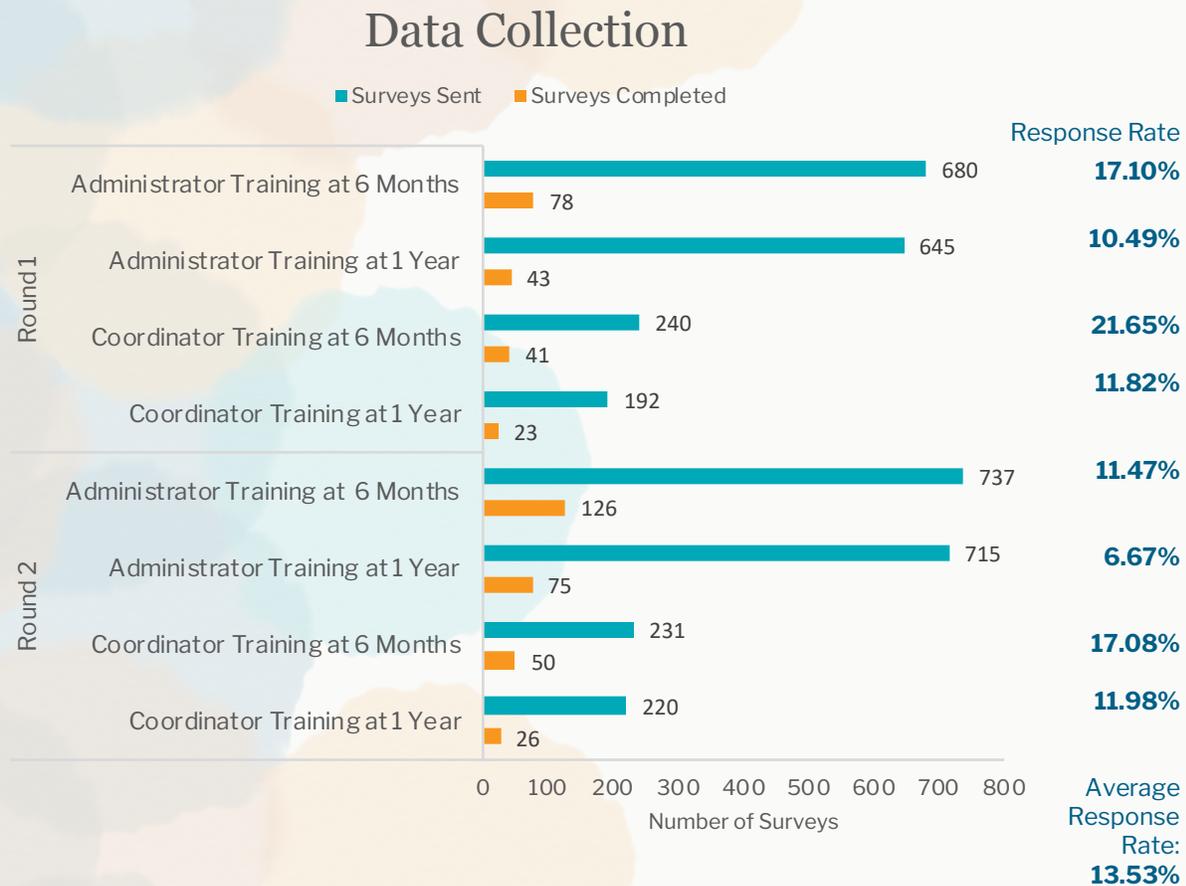
The RD Implementation survey was developed by the evaluator specifically for this evaluation based on several information sources. First, a careful review of the restorative practices literature, especially as it related to schools, was conducted. The literature review set the basis for understanding restorative practices, implementation and potential outcomes. Special attention was paid to other restorative justice informed approaches with youth and in schools emerging throughout the country. Next, any outcome studies and program evaluations were reviewed to understand methodology for measuring implementations and exploring outcomes. Then the evaluator attended one of the RD trainings to gain perspective on the process and consulted with the staff of IRJRD for specific questions directly related to the training process and materials. Once the implementation survey was drafted, it was reviewed by the IRJRD trainers and also sent for feedback from an external expert in implementing and evaluating restorative justice practice in schools.

### Data Collection

The implementation survey was distributed through Qualtrics, an on-line data collection platform. Each ESC provided available email contact information for each participant in the trainings. At approximately six months and one-year after their training, participants received a link to take the implementation survey. They were sent one reminder request to complete the survey and the survey was typically open for about two weeks. No financial or personal incentive was offered for completing the survey and the survey took 10-20 minutes to complete. A preliminary report was submitted to TEA with results for each round and type of training at six months and at one year. A total of 77 surveys were administered- twenty Administrator Readiness Surveys (ten at six months and ten at one year) and 17 Coordinator Surveys (ten at six months, and seven at one year because three sites had not reached the 1 year mark with in contract time).

While each wave of the survey had a different response rate, overall the response rate to the survey was low (7-22%). The low response rate can be attributed to a number of factors, including the busy schedules of school professionals, possible errors in the email lists provided by ESC regions, survey fatigue, length of time passed since training, and/or a possible hesitation in responding about implementation of RD practices. The response rate from the 6 month post-training mark to the 1 year post-training mark saw a significant reduction in responses. The number of surveys sent during each wave and the corresponding number of full or partial surveys completed are detailed on the next page.

Figure 1: Data Collection & Response Rates



### Statistical Analysis

Data analysis for this project consisted of two primary steps: the compiling and organizing of the data from the 77 implementation surveys and the decision-making about how to most clearly and meaningfully present the available data. Surveys were distributed separately to each of the 20 participating ESCs and at each of the two times (i.e., six months after the training and one year after the training) and so identification of those variables stemmed from the particular set in which a response was included. Where possible, surveys were matched across time and joined by the respondent email address used to distribute the survey.

Responses were analyzed and split into frequency tables and graphed for basic reporting. Relevant groups for comparison were then theoretically identified and cross-tabulations were conducted to examine potentially meaningful connections. In several instances, response categories were transformed to numeric variables to ease comparison between various subgroups. For example, In Figure 15 the implementation level reported by each participant was transformed into the number assigned to that implementation level (i.e., from “Getting Started” as 1 to “Thriving” as 5) and then averaged across all participants in that Location Type. Doing so allows for a concise comparison of the implementation levels reported across groups, but may also mask substantial variation within groups and so those results should be interpreted with that constraint in mind.

Note that in each cohort (Round 1 Coordinator, Round 1 Administrator Readiness, Round 2 Coordinator, Round 2 Administrator Readiness), fewer than half of respondents completed both the six month and one year implementation surveys. Given the relatively low number of responses in each cohort, further restricting analyses to only respondents who completed both six month and one year surveys would meaningfully limit the interpretability of results. It is also worth noting that a small percentage (5.8%) of respondents did not provide the information required so that their responses could be

matched across the six month and one year surveys and so they would need to be dropped from analyses of only matched surveys. As such, results in this report include all available data unless otherwise noted.

# RESULTS FROM THE RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

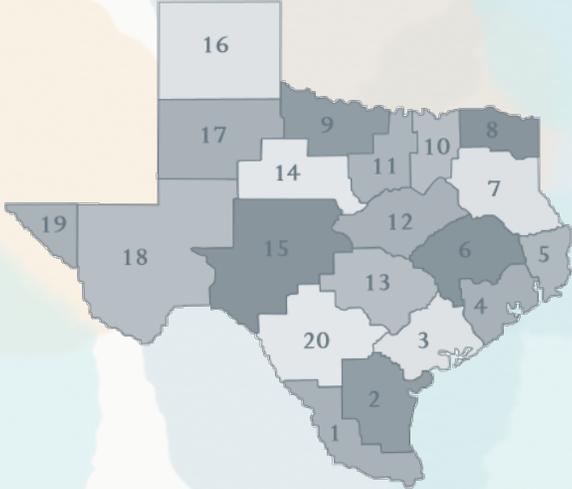
## Descriptive Information About Participant Characteristics

### ESC Trainings

The RD trainings were offered in two rounds to all twenty of the Texas Education Service Center (ESC) regions. The number of survey participants are noted below for each region. For further evaluation, the ESC regions were also grouped into three types: Urban, Rural, and Mixed (i.e., a combination of urban, suburban and rural). While some regions do not cleanly fit into one of the three location types, the best effort was made to place them in the category that best represents the majority of the member districts. This allowed for an evaluation of trends in RD implementation by characteristics of the region.

Figure 2: Training Participant Count by Round, ESC and Location type

Round	ESC	Location Type	Participant Count
2	ESC 1- Edinburg	Rural	20
2	ESC 2- Corpus Christi	Mixed	48
1	ESC 3- Victoria	Rural	16
1	ESC 4- Houston	Urban	42
2	ESC 5- Beaumont	Mixed	13
2	ESC 6- Huntsville	Mixed	14
2	ESC 7- Kilgore	Mixed	21
1	ESC 8- Mt. Pleasant	Rural	24
1	ESC 9- Wichita Falls	Rural	9
1	ESC 10- Richardson	Urban	39
1	ESC 11- Fort Worth	Urban	41
1	ESC 12- Waco	Mixed	35
2	ESC 13- Austin	Urban	27
2	ESC 14- Abilene	Rural	6
2	ESC 15- San Angelo	Rural	5
1	ESC 16- Amarillo	Mixed	19
2	ESC 17- Lubbock	Mixed	10
1	ESC 18- Midland	Rural	18
2	ESC 19- El Paso	Urban	21
1	ESC 20- San Antonio	Urban	34
Round 1 Total:		Urban Total:	204
Round 2 Total:		Mixed Total:	160
		Rural Total:	98



## Professional Characteristics

Participants were asked about their job setting, professional roles and years of experience in education. They were able to select more than one setting if they served multiple campuses or were placed in a non-traditional setting. Interestingly, over 50% of the participants said they worked in an elementary, intermediate or middle school. They were also asked the number of years they had been in their current professional position, as well as, the number of years they had served in education in total. In all, the participants represented a very highly experienced staff with over 80% having served in education for over ten years and almost 40% for over twenty years.

Figure 3: Respondent Job Setting

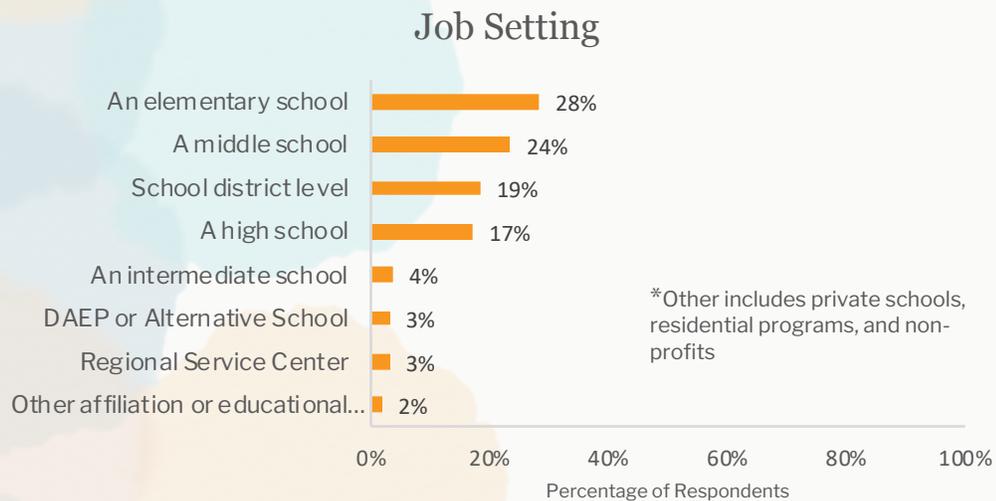


Figure 4: Respondent Job Title

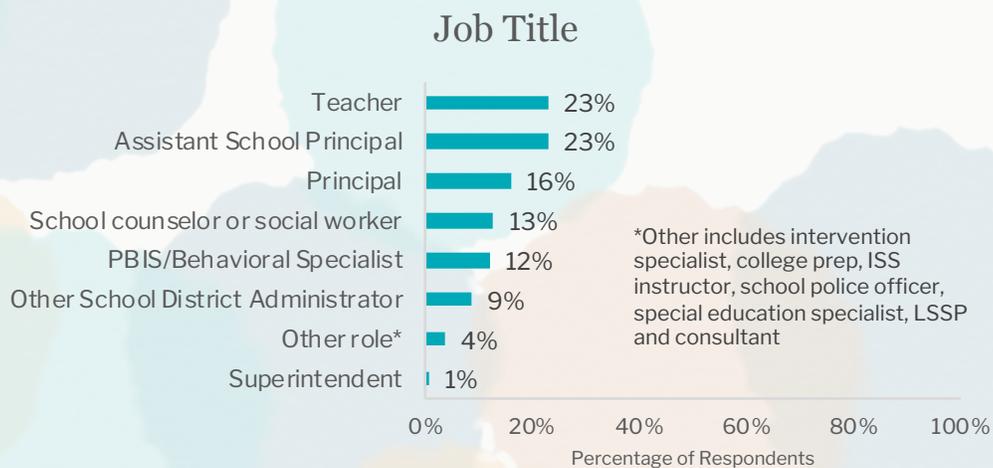


Figure 5: Respondent Time in Role

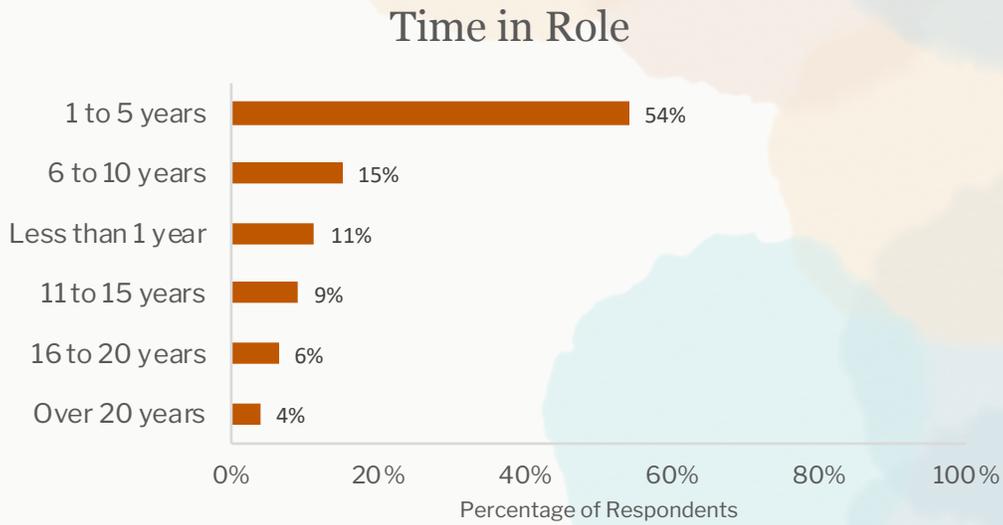
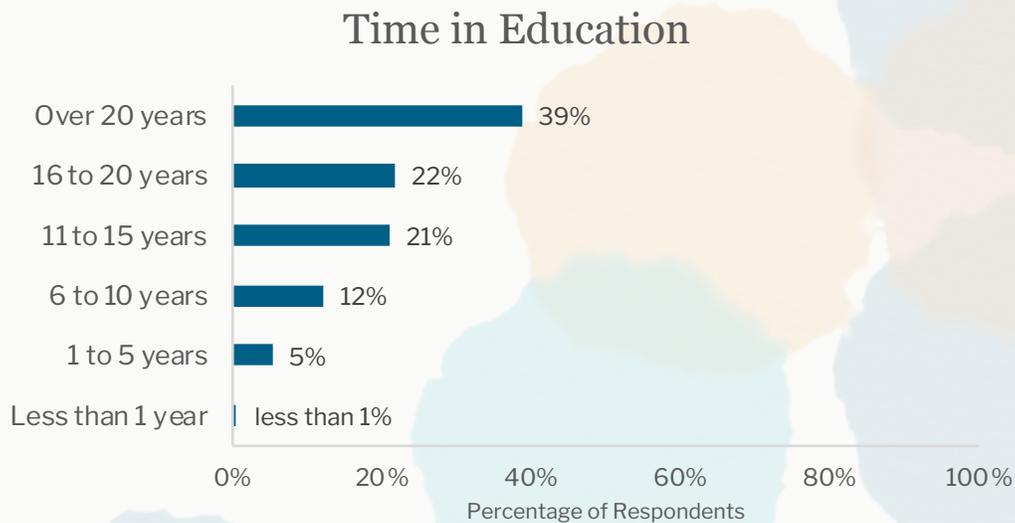


Figure 6: Respondent Time in Education



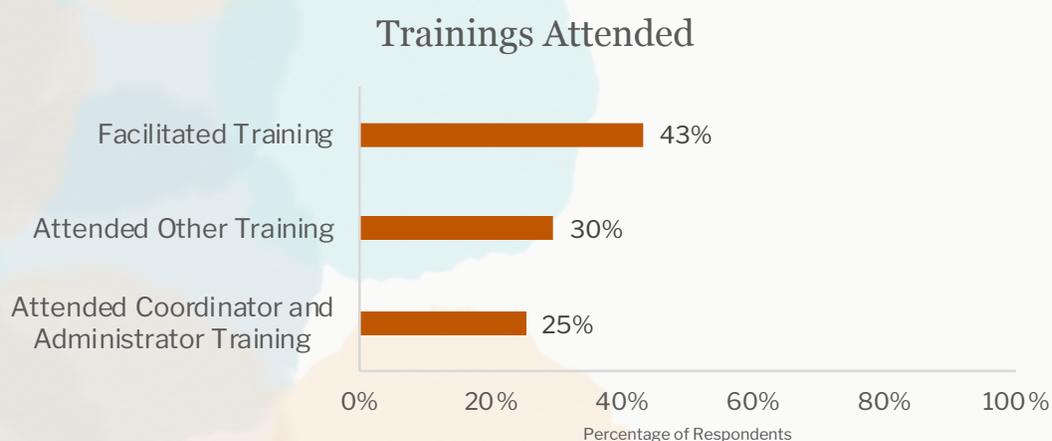
*“While implementation and acceptance by all teachers has been slow in coming, the RD practices have allowed for conversations between students and teachers that would normally would have never taken place. There is beginning to be a better understanding of each other and a growing level of comfort in sharing experiences that help in creating bonds and connections.”*

*- Training Participant*

## Restorative Practices Training Experience

Responses were collected to understand the additional level of training that participants had received in restorative discipline and/or restorative practices. They were asked if they attended the RD Administrator Readiness training *and* the RD Coordinator training provided in their region. Twenty-five percent had attended both trainings provided in their region through the Restorative Discipline project. The other trainings in restorative practices varied greatly. A number of respondents said that a restorative practice consultant provided 1 or 2 day trainings at their local district and/or school. Others said they had participated in restorative practice trainings at conferences or workshops. Finally, many participants reported involvement in book studies or personal professional development based on their interest in learning more about restorative practices. And, after completing the regional RD training, over 40% had provided a training in RD back at their local school or district.

Figure 7: Trainings Attended by Respondents



## Use of RD Strategies

In order to understand which RD strategies participants were using or observing on their campus, we asked them to respond to “*In a typical week in the last month, when an opportunity was presented, how often do you estimate your campus used the following Restorative Discipline techniques?*” Sixteen different strategies presented or discussed in the RD trainings were presented for them to quantify with never, a few times, often, almost always or unsure/unaware.

While the use of each strategy is listed below, the strategies were also collapsed into three distinct categories: Tier 1 interventions, Tier 2-3 interventions, and school community and staff interventions. RD was not developed with a tiered system in place, however the strategies were adapted to better understand the use of techniques within the three-tiered behavioral intervention system familiar to educators and used widely in schools.

Strategies that did not clearly fit into only one tier were placed according to the way they were presented during the trainings. The RD training strongly encourages the establishment of Tier 1 and school community and staff approaches prior to beginning the more intensive behavioral interventions represented in Tier 2 and 3 interventions. One unexpected finding was the number of responses that indicated they were “unsure or unaware” of the specific strategy. In part, this could be reflected in the lack of campus coordination and school-wide adoption of practices so that respondents are unsure of what is occurring outside of their own classrooms.

Figure 8: Total of use of RD strategies by RD Strategy Category

RD Strategies	Never	A few times	Often	Almost always	Unsure or Unaware of Strategy
<b>Tier 1 Intervention</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Circles for teaching content in the classroom	43%	28%	9%	2%	18%
Restorative conversations with students	12%	30%	31%	18%	9%
Community building classroom circles	39%	28%	14%	8%	11%
Affective statements and questions	20%	31%	25%	11%	13%
Restorative chats	23%	29%	22%	13%	12%
Impromptu, informal circles	37%	33%	13%	6%	11%
Problem solving circles	38%	27%	18%	3%	14%
Circles for inclusive decision making in the classroom	50%	21%	10%	2%	17%
Circles for Tier 1 group instruction around current issues (like bullying, safety, etc.)	40%	28%	15%	4%	12%
Circles for “check-in” and “check-out” in the classroom	47%	19%	13%	7%	14%
<b>Tier 2 or 3 Intervention</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Circles with students involved in a conflict	27%	41%	16%	6%	10%
Circles to repair harm in campus relationships	44%	28%	10%	4%	13%
Family group conference	62%	17%	5%	1%	14%
<b>School Community or Staff</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Circles including parents/caregivers	57%	21%	4%	2%	15%
Circles with school staff and faculty	46%	32%	8%	4%	11%
Sharing an RD resource among staff, such as a video, article or training materials	37%	35%	10%	5%	13%

*“A slow roll out has been the best advice! The trained coordinators at this time are both teachers, so we are just working with the classroom teachers on non-discipline related things. Once the counselor and AP are trained we’ll start using RD practices with more of the discipline issues.”*

*-Training Participant*

After indicating the specific RD strategies used on their campus, participants were asked to record which strategies or factors were the *most helpful* in supporting the successful implementation of RD practices at their school. The strategy mentioned most often was the shift to the use of circles for communicating with students and with each other. Small group circles are an integral part of RD practices, so it is not a surprise that many find the “circling” techniques as one of the most important RD strategies to get started. The next two factors described as most helpful for implementing RD practices was campus buy-in and administrator support. While these two factors are not listed as a specific strategy, they are strongly emphasized in the trainings as a key factor in the success of the school-wide change needed for implementation for RD. Many reported the benefit of having a core team of staff committed to RD philosophy and trying out RD practices. Also, having administrator support including time, training and encouragement made a significant impact on implementation. Another key factor in successful implementation was access to an RD coordinator or facilitator who could help problem solve and provide professional development to the entire campus. Finally, in addition to support from an RD coordinator,

many reported the importance of continued and on-going training and professional development for an entire campus.

*“The most successful impact of RD practices on a campus that we have worked with has been the use of the practices at Tier 1 and utilizing circles. Teachers find these to be effective, useable and easily integrated within existing processes”*

*-Training Participant*

Next, the use of Tier 1, Tier 2-3, and School Community and Staff RD interventions was examined by Round 1 or Round 2, training type and location type. While there is some variability within the responses, overall, a similar patterns emerges across groups that shows Tier 1 interventions are used most often, but not to the exclusion of Tier 2-3, and School Community and Staff approaches. However, the results do show that those individuals who took both the Administrator Readiness and Coordinator Trainings do show a slight disposition for focusing on school community or staff and for using more Tier 1 interventions which is in keeping with the principles and emphasis in the trainings.

Figure 9: RD Strategy Use by Round and RD Strategy Category

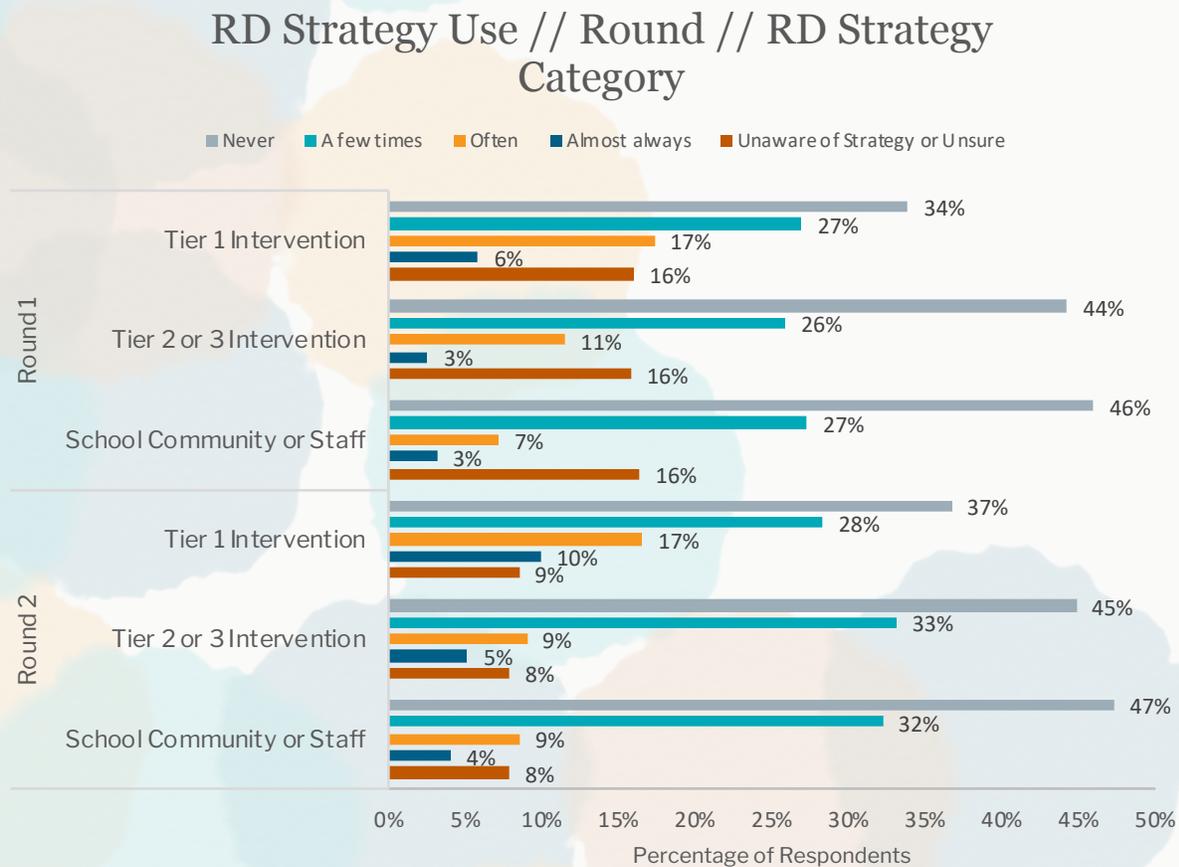


Figure 10: RD Strategy Use by Training Attended and RD Strategy Category

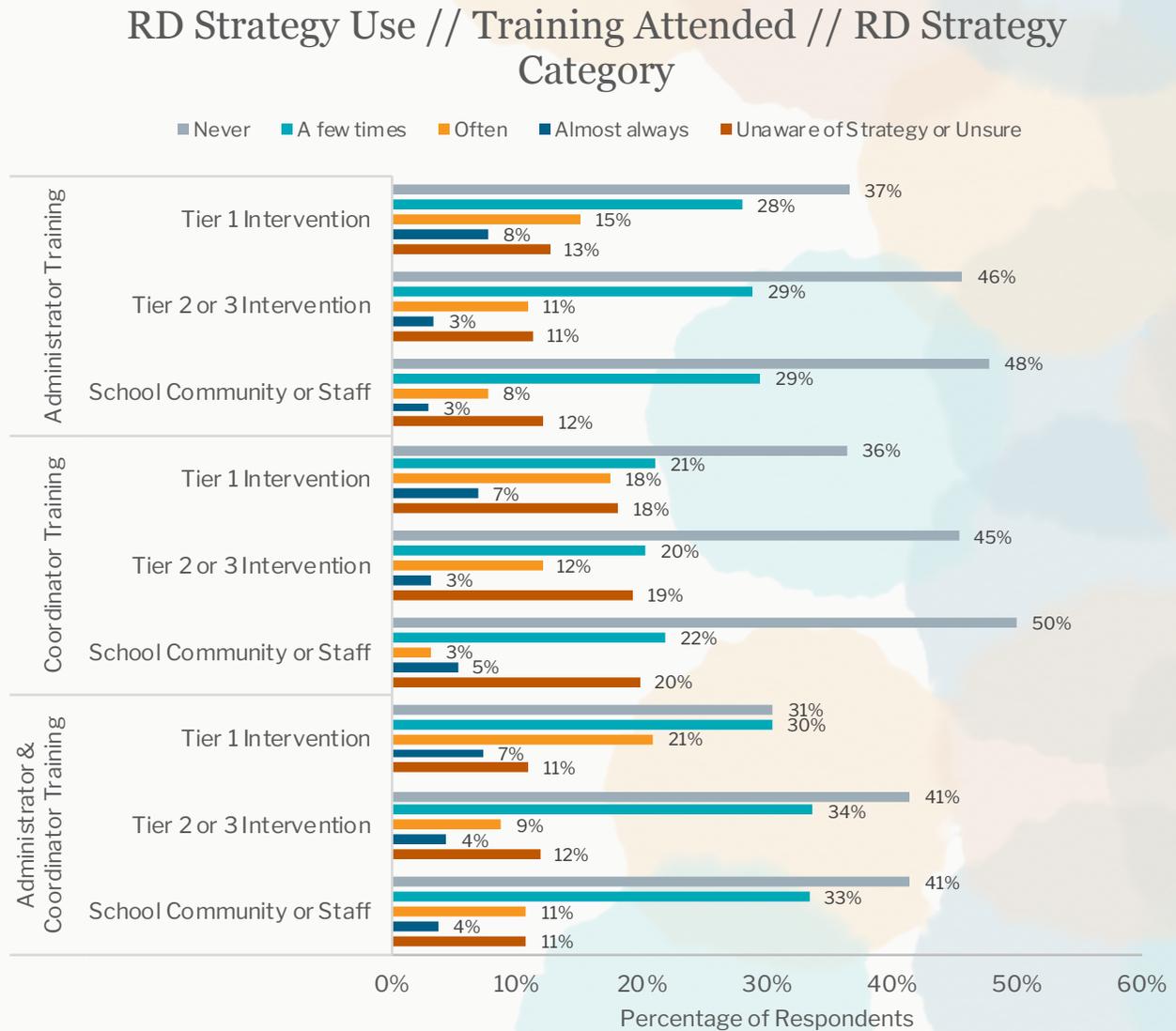


Figure 11: RD Strategy Use by Location Type & RD Strategy Category

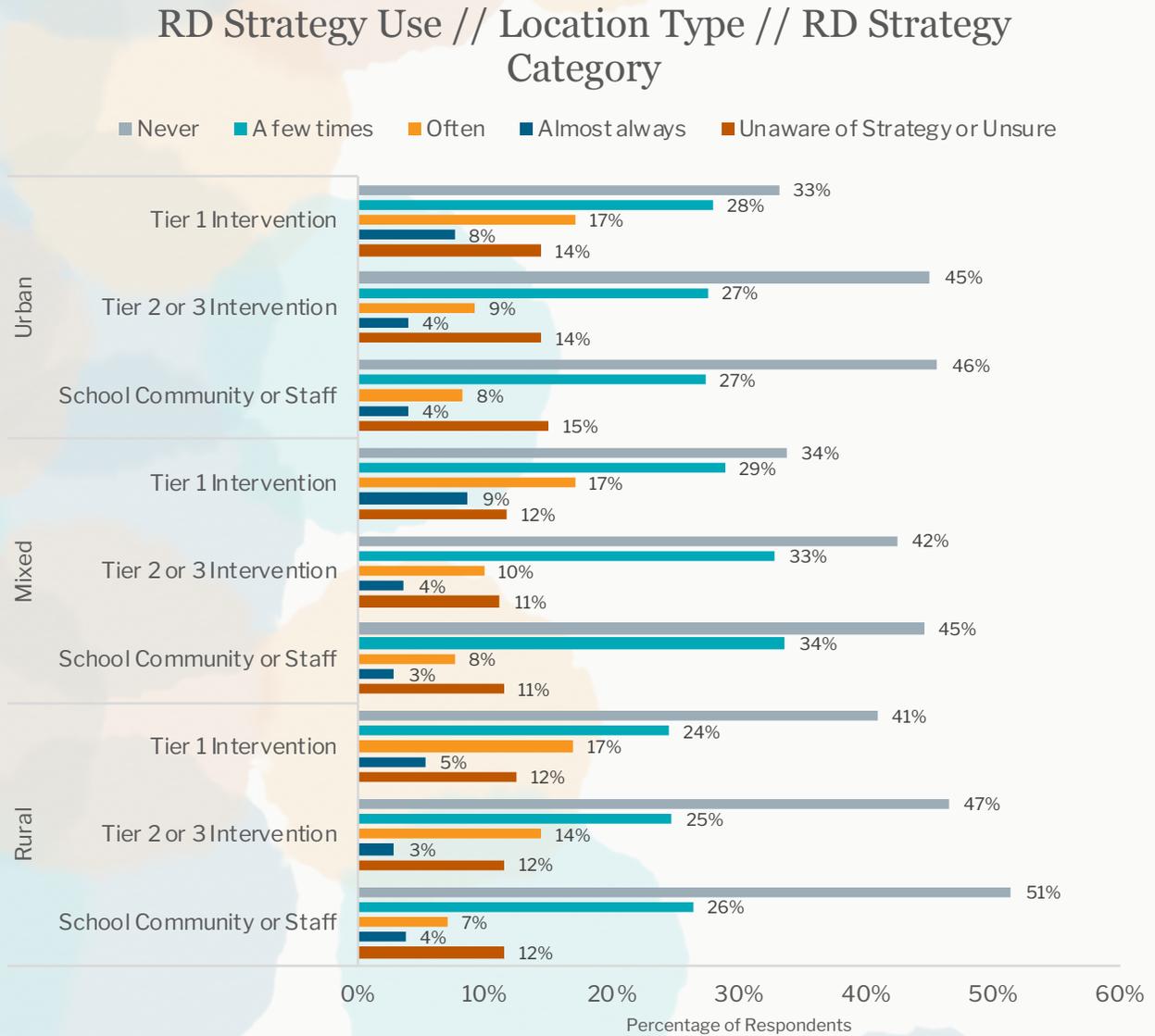
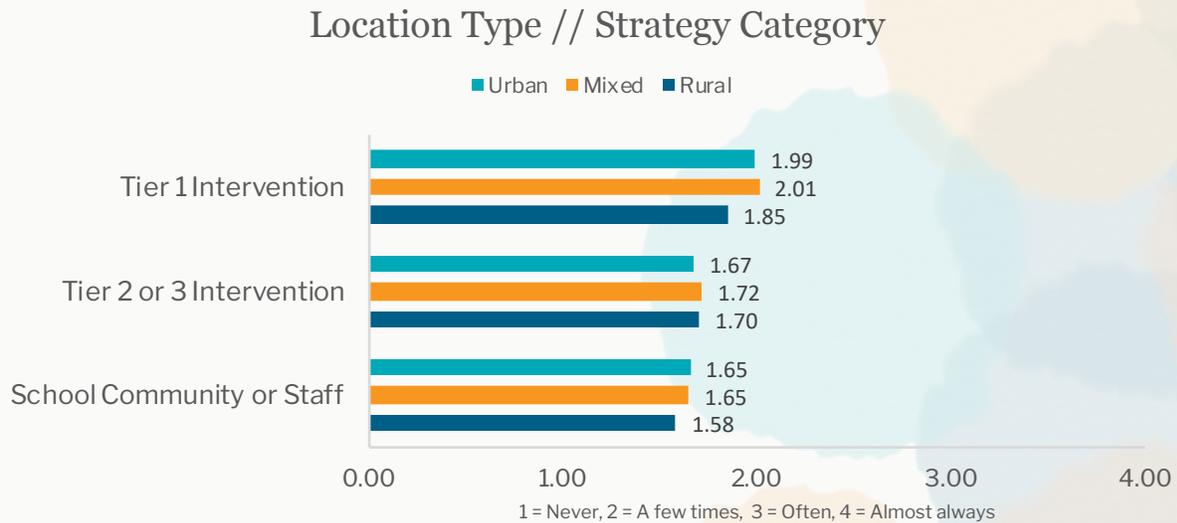


Figure 12 below provides a more concise view of the table in figure 8 with numeric averages of the four response options reported for each Location Type and Strategy Category. Here, ESCs included in the Urban location type had an average use of Tier 1 interventions of 1.99 on a 1 to 4 scale (where 1 = Never, 2 = A few times, 3 = Often, and 4 = Almost always). As shown, Tier 1 interventions are used most frequently across urban, rural and mixed ESC regions.

Figure 12: Means for Strategy Category & Location Type



### Implementation Levels

Next, participants were asked to assign a level of campus implementation. The following definitions were provided to guide participants in selecting the best match for implementation level:

**GETTING STARTED:** currently in discussion about implementing RD strategies. Activities may include planning, meetings and professional development. A few teachers or staff might be trying out circles and/or restorative conversations.

**EMERGING:** beginning of implementation of RD practices. Activities may include use of circles for faculty meetings or professional development, growing use as a Tier 1 approach, some use of circles in classrooms, discipline, and/or with families, but use is inconsistent across campus.

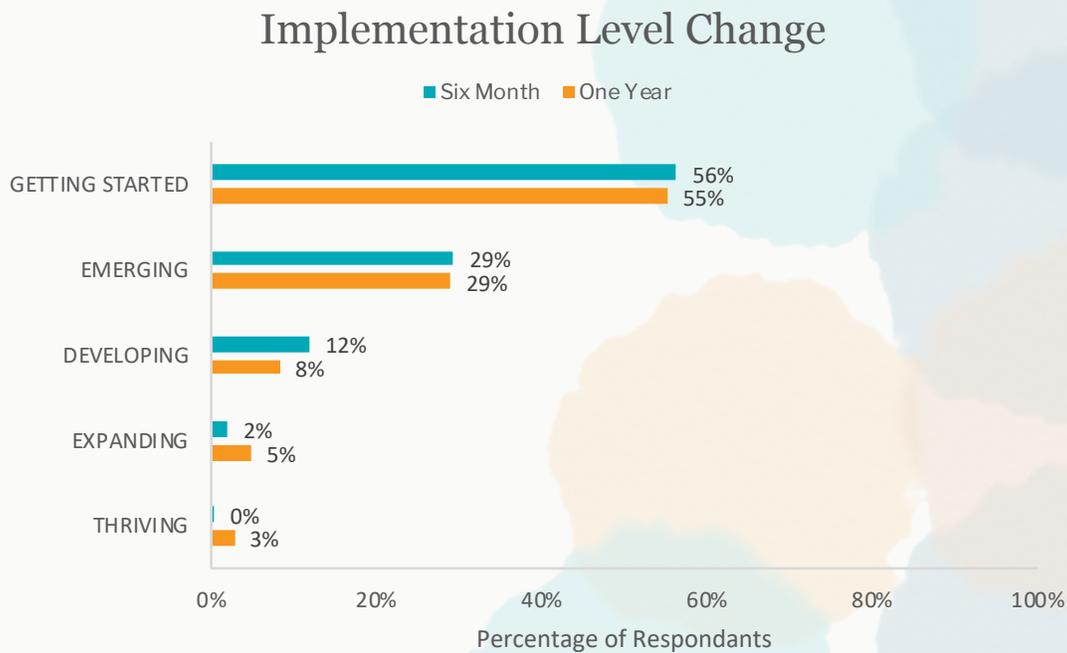
**DEVELOPING:** increasing use of RD practices school-wide. Activities may include consistent use of RD strategies in place for Tier 1, creation of a RD leadership team, attention to peer-led RD strategies, possible RD Coordinator in place, occasional use of RD practices for Tier 2 and 3, but use with discipline inconsistent.

**EXPANDING:** consistent use of RD practices by at least 50% of the teachers and staff in place for Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3. Clear policies in place and increased opportunities for professional development. RD Coordinator accessible and RD Leadership team meeting regularly. Expanding use of RD practices in intense and challenging situations.

**THRIVING:** Whole school Restorative Discipline practices in place. All staff trained in implementing RD practices. At least 80% of teachers, staff and administrators using circles and RD practices consistently at Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. RD practices and information consistently shared with students, parents, staff and community partners.

Perhaps the most important consideration when examining the results for the implementation levels is that it is a measure of the respondents' *perception* of where their school best fits into the above implementation categories. Perceptions are subjective and can be strongly influenced by expectations, recent experiences and professional roles. Different staff may have different perceptions about campus implementation level even within the same campus. That said, the implementation level descriptors were included on the survey to provide some consistency in thinking about level and participants were asked to pick the implementation level they felt *best* described their campus.

Figure 13: Respondent's Perception of Implementation Level Six Months vs. One Year



*"I think having the right people in leadership roles that are open minded and willing to try something new is key. I have seen the impact of administrators who have a negative attitude toward RD and it doesn't work. The schools that are having the most success have positive leaders that are encouraging opportunities for RD to happen. This includes making the time for RD circles and educating staff, parents and students about RD."*

*-Training Participant*

In the next four figures, implementation is measured numerically to allow the calculation of a mean implementation level for each group. In this numeric system, Getting Started is equal to 1, Emerging is equal to 2, Developing is equal to 3, Expanding is equal to 4, and Thriving is equal to 5. In this system, a change of 1 indicates that the average implementation level reported by the group improved one implementation level (e.g., from Getting Started to Emerging) between the Six Month and One Year follow-ups.

The results demonstrate a great deal of variability in change in implementation level from six months to one year. Many regions showed a small amount of growth, a couple

stayed around the same and a number of regions showed a small decrease in implementation level. Of course, since these findings do not include matched surveys (as explained above), caution is warranted in interpreting the changes over time. However, when the change in implementation level is explored by ESC setting type, it was noted that only the urban ESCs showed a net gain in implementation level from six months to one year. In addition, participants in round 2 and those that completed the Administrator Readiness training showed a greater increase in implementation level. That said, it is also important to recognize that some of those groups had a lower implementation level to start at the 6 month mark.

Figure 14: Six Month to One Year Level Implementation Level Change by ESC

Location	Six Month	One Year	Change
ESC 2- Corpus Christi	1.64	2.55	0.90
ESC 4- Houston	1.85	2.63	0.78
ESC 1- Edinburg	1.55	2.20	0.65
ESC 13- Austin	1.46	2.10	0.64
ESC 19- El Paso	1.38	1.80	0.42
ESC 20- San Antonio	1.50	1.83	0.33
ESC 10- Richardson	1.50	1.73	0.23
ESC 8- Mt. Pleasant	1.15	1.33	0.18
ESC 11- Fort Worth	1.27	1.42	0.15
ESC 7-Kilgore	1.56	1.67	0.11
<b>INCREASED</b>			
ESC 9- Wichita Falls	1.20	1.25	0.05
ESC 5- Beaumont	1.75	1.75	0.00
<b>STAYED THE SAME</b>			
ESC 18- Midland	1.64	1.50	-0.14
ESC 3- Victoria	1.63	1.40	-0.23
ESC 16- Amarillo	1.25	1.00	-0.25
ESC 17- Lubbock	1.67	1.40	-0.27
ESC 12- Waco	2.00	1.50	-0.50
ESC 15- San Angelo	1.75	1.00	-0.75
ESC 6- Huntsville	2.43	1.50	-0.93
ESC 14- Abilene	2.00	1.00	-1.00
<b>DECREASED</b>			

Figure 15: Six Month to One Year Level Implementation Level Change by Location Type

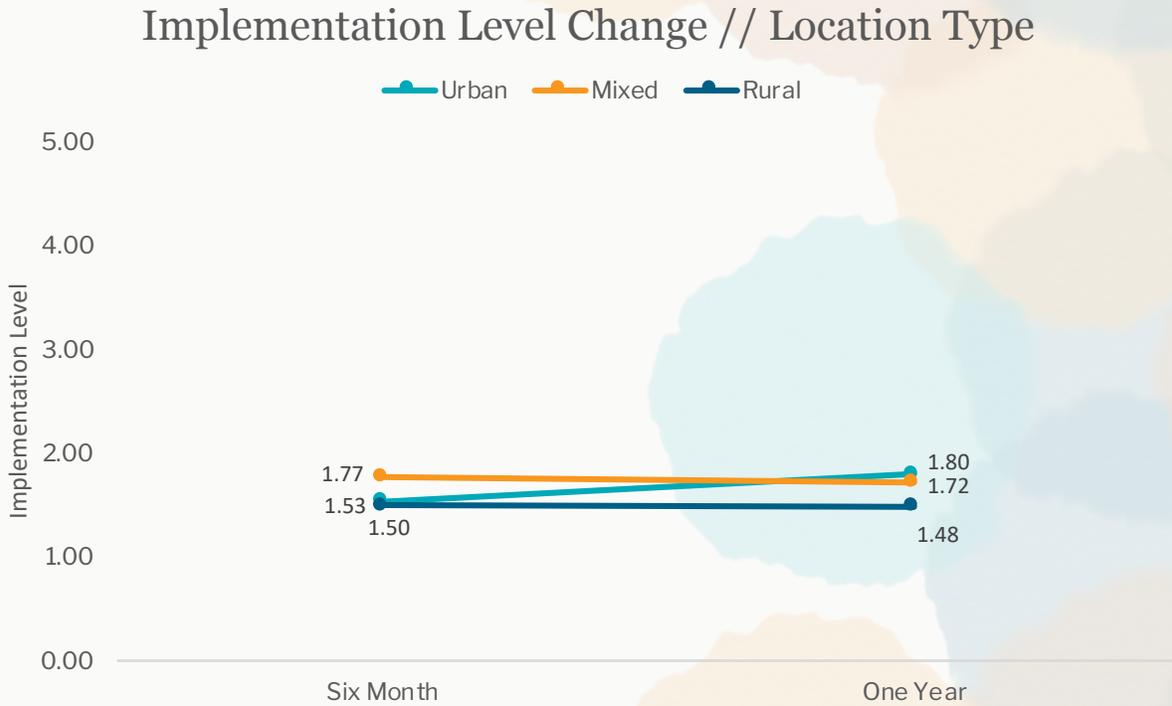


Figure 16: Six Month to One Year Level Implementation Level Change by Round

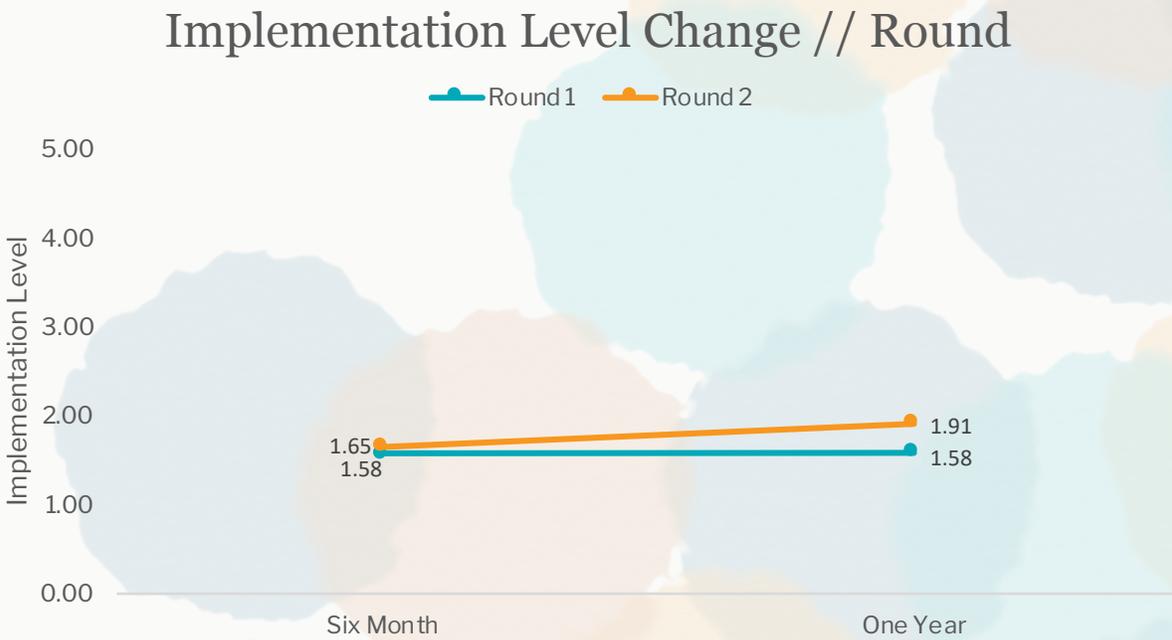
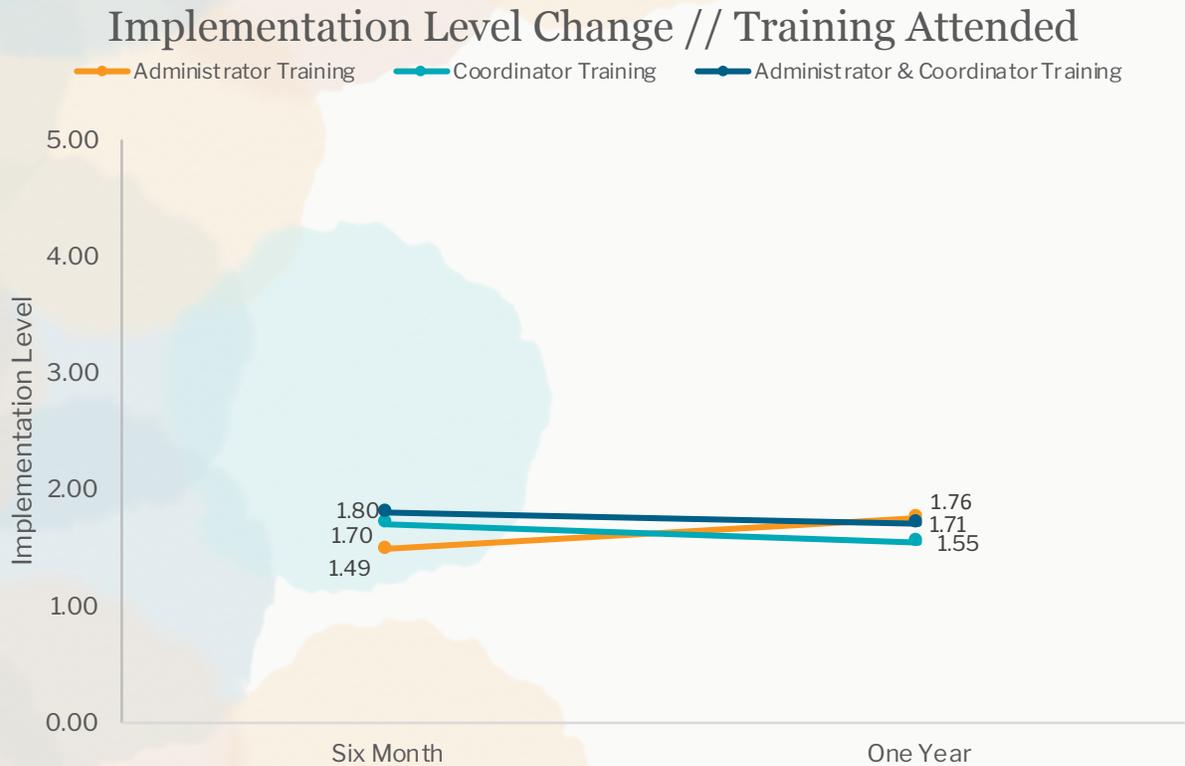


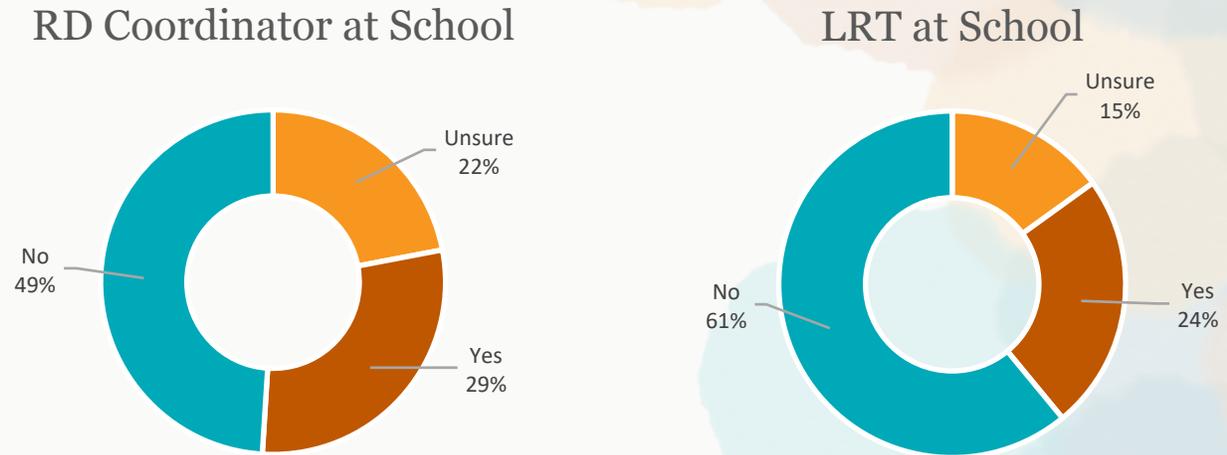
Figure 17: Six Month to One Year Level Implementation Level Change by Training Attended



One other important indicator related to implementation was whether or not a school had established a Leadership Response Team (LRT) or access to a Restorative Discipline Coordinator. The trainings emphasized that best practices in restorative discipline in schools included an LRT for local planning and problem-solving, and a RD Coordinator to assist the campus in implementation.

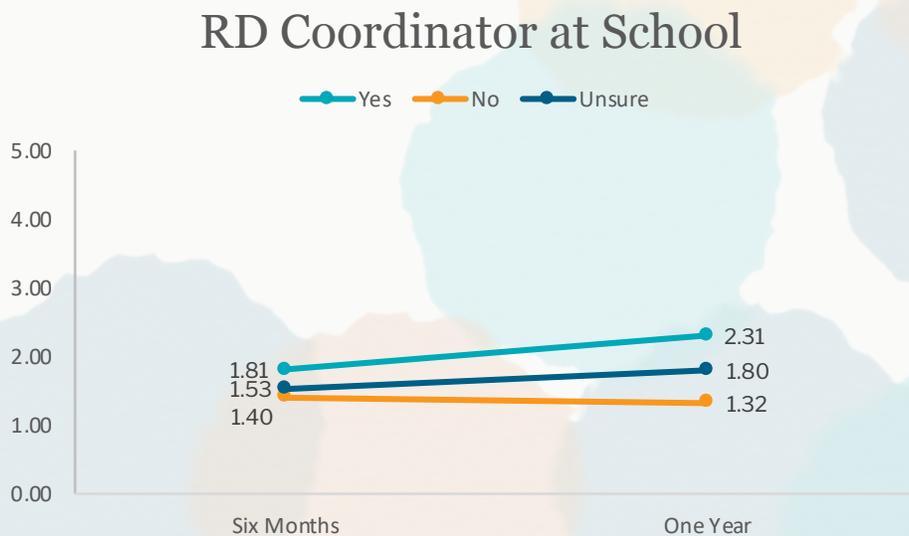
Almost a quarter of the respondents (24%) indicated that they had an LRT at their school and a few more (29%) knew their campus had a RD Coordinator. For those that indicated that their school had a designated Restorative Discipline Coordinator, the vast majority reported that the RD Coordinator is an additional role assigned to a campus staff. That is, if a school has a RD coordinator it is typically someone that is also already a teacher, counselor or administrator rather than someone dedicated full time to supporting restorative discipline on the campus. Some reported a dedicated RD coordinator at the district level that served all schools in the district. A few respondents said that the district had contracted with an outside consultant to provide RD support.

Figure 18: Respondent knowledge of RD and LRT at School



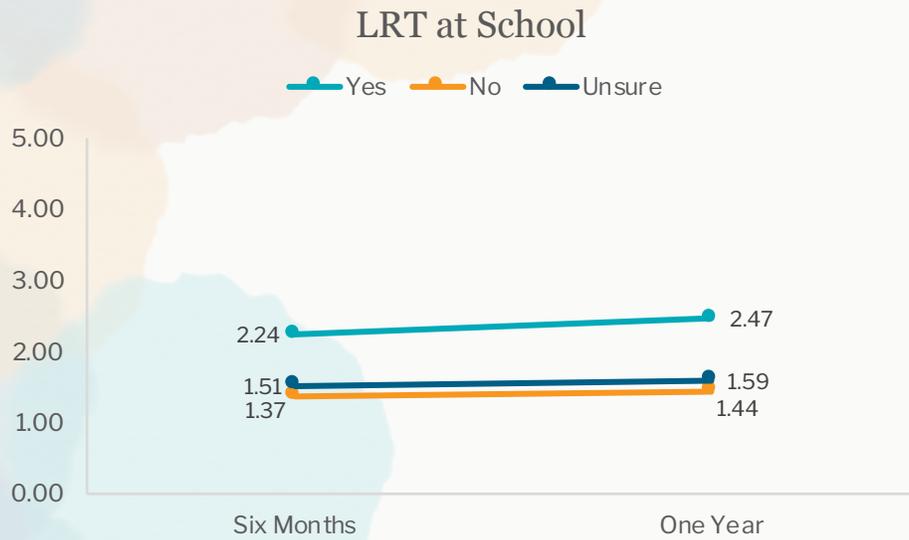
For those campuses that did have an LRT and an RD Coordinator, the increase in implementation level from 6 months to 1 year was considerably more than for those without (or who were unsure). Of course, it might be true that those campuses further along are more likely to have an LRT and/or a RD Coordinator, but it could also suggest that having either (or both) facilitated successful implementation of RD practices.

Figure 19: 6 Month to 1 year Implementation Level Change by RD Coordinator at School



It is also worth noting that figures 19 and 20 include only ‘matched’ surveys (i.e., surveys from participants that completed both the Six Month and One Year surveys and provided information necessary to link their surveys)

Figure 20: 6 Month to 1 year Implementation Level Change by RD Coordinator at School



We asked participants to indicate any *unique or special conditions* at their school that they feel helped to facilitate the implementation of RD practices. While the answers varied quite a bit, several specific circumstances were mentioned by a number of respondents. First, many felt that implementation success was facilitated by a school with established student support programming like PBIS, SEL and school-based mental health. Those schools with strong student support services in place were able to integrate RD practices more smoothly and with better campus buy-in. Likewise, schools with a culture where administrators and staff were open to innovation and change were better able to implement RD practices. Also, having flexibility in their budget for funds to support the addition of a dedicated RD coordinator was cited as helpful. Another specific condition that was mentioned was schools that were under external pressure to reduce disproportionate disciplinary rates. Several respondents felt that this pressure strongly encouraged administrators and staff to be open to new ideas and approaches, as well as, recognizing that traditional punitive strategies were not working. Finally, a number of respondents worked at a DAEP and felt that the structure of a smaller school that by nature handled significant disciplinary issues, and students that had not responded well to traditional punitive discipline, was well suited to implement RD practices.

### Perceived Impact of RD practices on campus

Next, participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of the impact that RD practices have made on their campus. A number of potential impacts were identified from the training curriculum, as well as, the empirical literature about restorative practices. Participants were asked, “*in your opinion, how true are the following statements at your school?*”

Figure 21: Perceived Impacts of RD practices

RD Impacts	Not True	Somewhat True	Very True	Unsure
<b>Conflict Resolution</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>24%</b>	
RD has helped improve how students resolve conflicts with peers and staff	13%	34%	17%	36%
RD has helped improve how adults resolve conflicts with students	17%	33%	13%	37%
<b>Student Behavior</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>24%</b>	
RD has helped increase student accountability for behavior	8%	40%	21%	31%
RD has helped manage difficult student behaviors in the classroom	11%	40%	16%	33%
Restorative practices have extended beyond Tier 1 interventions	24%	25%	11%	39%
<b>School Climate</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>26%</b>	
RD has helped improve overall school climate	15%	33%	17%	35%
RD has helped increase the level of respect on campus	13%	33%	18%	35%
RD has helped increase the feeling of safety for all members of the school community	20%	25%	13%	41%
<b>Relationships</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>23%</b>	
RD has helped repair harm in campus relationships	16%	32%	15%	37%
RD has helped build relationships between teachers and students	11%	38%	20%	31%
RD has helped build relationships between teachers / staff	20%	28%	15%	37%
RD has helped build a connection between the school, parents and community	24%	22%	9%	45%
<b>Disciplinary Action and Attendance</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>24%</b>	
RD has helped to reduce in-school suspensions	14%	31%	17%	38%
RD has helped to reduce out-of-school suspensions	16%	27%	19%	39%
RD has helped to reduce expulsions	18%	21%	16%	45%
RD has helped reduce disciplinary referrals	15%	31%	15%	39%
RD has helped reduce some cases of chronic absenteeism	28%	21%	4%	47%
<b>Social-emotional and Leadership Skills</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>19%</b>	
RD has supported youth leadership opportunities in peer-led circles	32%	20%	6%	42%
RD has helped the development of social and emotional skills of students	11%	38%	17%	34%
<b>Disproportionality</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>12%</b>	
RD has helped impact issues of racial and/or ethnic inequalities in discipline	25%	18%	5%	51%
RD has helped impact issues of inequalities in discipline for students receiving special education services	24%	20%	7%	48%

A follow up question was presented to those that selected “not true” as a response to whether the specific impact could be recognized on their campus. That is, they were asked if they believed that *RD has the potential to make the impact, but that RD was not far enough along*, or if they *do not believe that RD could have the specific impact* at their school. The vast majority of responses across the board indicated that the respondents felt that RD had the potential to make the impact but was not far enough along yet.

*“The biggest impact is the feeling of mutual respect among staff and students. Students feel as though they have a voice and that teachers truly listen. Also, it has provided a model for conflict resolution among our students that they actively seek out.”*

*-Training Participant*

When participants were asked what they felt has been the *most successful* impact of RD practices on their campus, three specific areas were mentioned the most frequently. The most frequently cited success was the strengthening of relationships between all members of the school community, including student-to-student and student-to-teacher. Improved relationships included the development and building of relationships, as well as, the repairing of relationships that experienced harm. The second impact mentioned was on the improvement of the school climate. Respondents often used the terms 1) *respect*, 2) *trust*, and 3) *understanding* in describing changes in school climate due to the adoption of RD practices. Finally, many people also described the significant positive impact on communication within the school community. Participants explained that RD practices gave them specific tools to both connect with each other and to solve problems in a constructive way.

In order to further understand the perceived impact of RD strategies, the twenty-one distinct RD impacts were collapsed into seven themes: Conflict Resolution, Disciplinary Action and Attendance, Disproportionality, Relationships, School Climate, Social-emotional and Leadership Skills and Student Behavior. The themes with the highest responses of impact of *somewhat or very true* were Conflict Resolution (77%), Student Behavior (77%), School Climate (74%) and Relationships (71%). Impacts on the disproportionate use of disciplinary action for students of color or those receiving special education services were perceived to be the least impacted by RD practices. However, once removing those that were “unsure” about half of the respondents felt that RD has had a positive impact on disproportionality and about half of the respondents felt RD had not impacted disproportionate disciplinary rates to date on their campus.

*“RD is a long-term process of establishing multiple vision statements, goals, and smaller objectives on a journey to creating a culture rather than a product out of a box that can be implemented right away. As such, time and willingness to pay attention and risk oneself to learn something new, are the biggest barriers that are seen and anticipated currently amongst the staff.”*

*-Training Participant*

### Barriers to Implementation

Finally, the respondents were asked to consider the barriers they experienced or observed that hindered the successful implementation of RD at their campus or district. While fourteen different barriers were presented and each one had over thirty responses, it was clear *that issues related to time, training and inconsistent use across campus* were the primary barriers faced by those trying to implement RD.

The barriers were examined by subgroups, including ESC setting, Round 1 or 2 and the type of training the respondent attended; however, a very similar pattern emerged indicating that the perceived barriers were consistently recognized across all participants and groups. One notable difference was that participants from the urban ESCs reported a lower percentage of “School staff and teachers not willing to engage in restorative practices”

(Urban 38%, Mixed 46% and Rural 50%). More research is needed to know *why* those teaching in urban schools appear to be more willing to engage in restorative practices, but it is interesting to note.

Figure 22: Barriers to Implementation

Barriers	Percentage of Respondents
More training and coaching needed	56%
School staff/teachers not willing to engage in restorative practices	45%
RD strategies used inconsistently across teachers and staff	43%
Not enough time for circles or other RD practices	41%
Not enough time to plan and coordinate implementation of RD strategies	40%
Lack of administrative support	29%
Funds unavailable for additional professional development	27%
Conflict with the values and norms about traditional discipline at your school	21%
Complexity in integrating RD in current Code of Conduct	17%
Students not willing to engage in restorative practices	13%
Conflict or redundancy with other approaches like Positive Behavior Interventions Support (PBIS) or Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)	11%
Not all students asked or encouraged to participate	9%
Lack of support from an RD coordinator	9%
Unclear discipline policies for serious offenses	9%

*“While all the normal barriers exist, there is one that has hindered implementation to a great extent. The administrator in charge of overseeing implementation handles nearly all discipline and is overwhelmed. Teachers are also overwhelmed with discipline problems and everyone is frustrated. It may have been better to take a year to work with teachers before attempting an uninformed implementation.”*

*-Training Participant*

As is clearly indicated in the survey results, time, training and campus buy-in are the most significant barriers to the successful implementation of RD practices. When asked to explain the *most significant* barrier on their campus, respondents were able to provide further context about the barriers. Most respondents felt that finding the time for learning and implementing new strategies was challenging, even for those that were supportive. And, most felt that additional training was needed for both those that received some RD training already and for others on their campus who had not received any RD training. The barrier of administrator and teacher buy-in was explained as campus staff that did not think change was necessary, that did not see a clear connection between RD practices and testing/student achievement, those that felt punitive consequences were essential, and those that were not comfortable with the interpersonal nature inherent in RD strategies. Another issue that impacted buy-in was staff turnover. A number of people described an RD champion (from superintendent to principal to teacher) that began the process of implementing RD and then moved from their position, stalling the process and discouraging the effort of implementation. Finally, one other interesting barrier described by a number of respondents was the lack of other campuses in their district or local area to serve as mentors

or resources. It was difficult for a school to continue momentum when they were the only ones they knew trying to implement RD practices.

The recommendations for *most needed supports* closely follow the barriers that were identified by the respondents. They feel that school campuses most need additional training and support (ideally from a dedicated, campus-based RD coordinator) in order to encourage administrator and teacher buy-in consistently across an entire campus. At the district-level, many felt that a significant financial investment would expand opportunities for training and support, as well as, serve as a directive to schools across the district as to the importance of implementing RD practices.

## LIMITATIONS

Several important limitations need to be considered when understanding the results presented in the evaluation. Best efforts were made to mitigate any of these limitations in both the data collection and in the analysis of the data, but caution still needs to be used when interpreting the results. First, the data collection was voluntary and had a low response rate. A low number of training participants responded to implementation surveys (only one cohort had a response rate above 20%) and that limits interpretability of data in two primary ways. First, patterns of responses by subgroup must be considered very cautiously because membership in each subgroup is limited to small numbers and individual idiosyncrasies have an outsized influence. Second, because the survey was voluntary, there is theoretical reason to believe that respondents to the survey may be different than non-respondents in important ways. For example, perhaps those participants most committed or most frustrated with the RD implementation process were more likely to take the time to complete the survey. Thus, the results should not be considered as representative of the experience of those that did not respond or generalized to a larger population.

Next, responses from participants were inconsistent from the 6 month to the 1 year data points. Among those who responded to the six month implementation survey, a minority responded to the corresponding one year survey. Furthermore, some respondents completed only the one year implementation survey, leaving them without an earlier time point for comparison. This inconsistency hindered the ability to make confident attributions about changes in RD implementation from six month to one year by subgroup. Combined with the low response rate, few analyses were able to use matched data from the six month to the one year surveys.

Finally, the survey questions assessed the training participants' *perceptions* related to implementation and relied on self-report data from participants. While that self-report data is a crucial component in assessing the implementation and impact of RD, the responses are subjective rather than based on objective external outcome measures. As time and implementation move forward, including outcome measures could contribute to further understanding.

## DISCUSSION

*“When we are able to use this practice with fidelity, we have a great response. The issue is getting more people on board with making it happen. I believe we have enough people who are “RD curious” to make a push for a more solid implementation next year.”*

*-Training Participant*

### Implementation of RD

At one-year post training, 84% of participants reported their school or district’s implementation level as either Getting Started or Emerging in RD practices. This result is in line with the both the Administrator Readiness and RD Coordinator trainings’ explicit instruction for a slow roll out focused on sharing knowledge, building relationships and using Tier 1 strategies to impact school climate. The results indicate that progress was made on the primary project goal of building capacity for the implementation of RD in schools around Texas. Although more research is needed to understand why and how implementation is further along at some sites over others, the data collected supports the designation of a campus-based RD coordinator or a strong champion to encourage buy-in and additional local training in RD practices. For example, the ESC regions that demonstrated the top five largest increase in implementation level (ESCs 2, 4, 1, 13 and 19) all have districts that requested and been provided additional RD training at their own expense.

While not enough time has passed to expect significant strides in implementation level at one year post training, the trends in change in implementation level from six months to one year provide information about the momentum of change. Ten ESC sites showed at least a 0.10 change in implementation level, two stayed about the same and eight decreased more than 0.10 in implementation level – though all changes were in small degrees. The variability in results suggests that RD implementation is complex and impacted by a number of factors. ESCs that were categorized as urban and those in Round 2 of the trainings did show more RD implementation progress, but more research is needed to understand why implementation moved forward in some places and why it stalled or decreased in another. The exploration of barriers experienced by participants can provide some insight to the possible reasons that implementation did not move forward in some places, but additional data collected over time would contribute to the understanding of how and why implementation was increasing (or not). In addition, a successful RD implementation pattern has not been established as this is a new training initiative, so it is unknown if the any of the changes from six months to one year are indicative of an ultimately successful outcome.

Another way to understand the implementation data other than trends, is in its meaningful connection to the use of RD strategies and to perceived impact. The differences in reported strategy use and impact by implementation level indicate that respondents appear to have internalized both the tools and goals of RD and the 'ruler' by which their use of RD should be measured. To say that another way, those who reported more use of RD strategies and greater impact of RD also report that implementation is further along. While causality between those features cannot be distinguished here, the association between those variables suggests that respondents truly understand RD and recognize it (or the lack of it) in their schools.

### Use of RD Strategies

The data on the use of RD strategies shows that people are trying out and using specific restorative practices on their campuses. Respondents indicate that almost a quarter (24%) are using Tier 1 strategies when an opportunity was presented often or almost always, compared with 15% for Tier 2-3 and 12% for School Community and Staff strategies. The strategies involving the use of various types of circles for communication were the most widely used and in-line with building relationships.

The trainings strongly emphasized the establishment of Tier 1, relational and whole school-based approaches before the more intensive behavioral interventions of Tier 2-3, and while the findings do show more use of Tier 1, many participants also report using Tier 2-3 strategies. Again, the impact of moving to Tier 2-3 interventions in the early stages of implementation is unknown but has been cautioned against in the training curriculum.

It was interesting to see the results of the large number of respondents who said they never used Tier 1 strategies (35%) or that they were unsure or unaware of specific RD strategies (from 9-18% for each specific strategy). More information is needed to understand the gap between the training and the application of strategies on campus. A few respondents explained that even at one year post training they were still waiting to get started, so that could impact the use of RD strategies, but it is unknown to what extent.

### Perceived Impact of RD

The perceived impacts of RD reported by the participants were wide-spread and encouraging. Despite early implementation levels and emerging use of RD strategies, the participants felt that RD was already having important impacts on their campus from school climate to classroom management to discipline. The twenty-one possible impacts were categorized into seven themes, and the majority of respondents felt that it was *somewhat true* or *very true* that RD had a positive impact on Conflict Resolution (77%), Student Behavior (77%), School Climate (74%), Relationships (71%), Disciplinary Action and Attendance (69%), Social-emotional and Leadership Skills (66%), and Disproportionality (51%). The findings suggest that even small changes in the use of RD practices can have a meaningful impact on a school, even in areas that may be difficult to change.

Furthermore, a follow up question was presented to those that selected “not true” as a response to whether the specific impact could be recognized on their campus. That is, they were asked if they believed that RD has the potential to make the impact, but that RD was not far enough along, or if they do not believe that RD could have the specific impact at their school. About 90% of all respondents felt that RD had the potential to make the specific impact on their campus, but that implementation was not far enough along. This is a significant finding in that despite the implementation level, use of strategies or barriers experienced, educators are either recognizing a positive impact already or optimistic about the potential effect of RD practices on their campus.

### Barriers to Implementing RD

The number and types of barriers that respondents experienced trying to implement RD on their campuses was also widespread. As described in the results, the most significant barriers were described as time for planning and use of strategies, more training and professional development to support implementation and school-wide adoption resulting in consistent use of RD strategies. The slow pace for gaining school-wide buy-in for RD practices can be especially frustrating for early adopters. The experience with barriers also demonstrates that RD implementation requires more than just a shift in thinking, but also a shift in policies and practices. Having administrator support, including funds to bring in resources, is imperative for success school-wide. Also, schools need to address policy implications regarding changes to the Code of Conduct, and clearly communicate and consistently handle serious disciplinary offenses.

### RD Fit with Other School Programs

A problem faced by many teachers, staff and administrators is confusion and fatigue related to numerous new initiatives, programs, and approaches meant to improve some aspect of schooling. Educators are often required to participate or use new initiatives with very little input or room to adapt based on campus need. The RD project was designed to engage teachers and administrators in the process, strengthen school relationships and allow for local context. In addition, the RD project explicitly intended to work in tandem with many of the currently utilized approaches like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and Capturing Kids Hearts.

Therefore, data was collected to see if, in fact, educators felt that RD presented any conflict or redundancy with other initiatives or approaches being used on their campus. Only 11% of respondents felt that RD conflicted with something else already established at

their school. Also, when respondents were asked an open-ended question about any special or unique conditions at their school that they felt facilitated RD implementation, a number of people responded that established student support programming like PBIS, SEL and school-based mental health facilitated the integration of RD practices more smoothly and with better campus buy-in.

### Disproportionality in Disciplinary Action

Changing outcomes related to the disproportionate use of disciplinary action for students of color and for those receiving special education is a central priority of RD. While the data show some perceived positive change in disproportionality, the results are mixed. This is likely reflected in the need for more time for RD implementation, but also the challenge in shifting thinking from punitive disciplinary practices to restorative practices, especially in light of institutionalized racism and unconscious bias. It was interesting to note that external pressure regarding disciplinary rates was considered by some participants as motivation for using RD approaches. Further implementation is likely needed to better assess how RD practices are impacting disciplinary action, especially at the Tier 2-3 levels. Over time, directly evaluating TEA disciplinary data reported by individual campuses and districts will be a better indicator for understanding the effect of RD practices.

### Moving Forward with RD in Texas

Overall, the results demonstrate that the capacity has grown for implementing restorative discipline practices at schools. Respondents indicated that despite the barriers, they are optimistic about the potential impacts of RD. They said that they desire more training, more support and more educators on their campuses to learn (and appreciate) restorative practices. That said, some cautions emerged, too. Continued implementation is strongly tied to increased support school-wide, which hinges on more professional development and opportunities for improved school climate and a relational environment based on communication, mutual understanding and respect between all members of a school community.

## APPENDIX

### Restorative Discipline Implementation Survey

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[Note: Survey will collect demographic, school role and professional experience not reflected in this draft. Survey will be administered using web-based survey software supported by UT-Austin.]

- 1) In addition to the Restorative Discipline 2-day administrator readiness training, have you attended the Restorative Discipline 5-day Coordinators Training?  
[Options: Yes, No, Unsure]
- 2) Have you participated in any other training on Restorative Discipline or Restorative Practices?  
[If yes, box will ask what and when]
- 3) Have you facilitated Restorative Discipline training for other staff in your school or district?  
[If yes, what, who and when]
- 4) Is there a designated Restorative Discipline (RD) Coordinator in your school or district?  
[If yes, ask for more info...is it someone on-site, an independent, accessibility]
- 5) Has your school or district developed a Leadership Team for Restorative Discipline?  
[If yes, who (roles) is on team?]
- 6) Read the descriptions below about levels of campus implementation of Restorative Discipline Practices. Select the one that *best* describes RD implementation at your school.
  - GETTING STARTED: currently in discussion about implementing RD strategies. Activities may include planning, meetings and professional development. A few teachers or staff might be trying out circles and/or restorative conversations.
  - EMERGING: beginning of implementation of RD practices. Activities may include use of circles for faculty meetings or professional development, growing use as a Tier 1 approach, some use of circles in classrooms, discipline, and/or with families, but use is inconsistent across campus.
  - DEVELOPING: increasing use of RD practices school-wide. Activities may include consistent use of RD strategies in place for Tier 1, creation of a RD leadership team, attention to peer-led RD strategies, possible RD Coordinator in place, occasional use of RD practices for Tier 2 and 3, but use with discipline inconsistent.
  - EXPANDING: consistent use of RD practices by at least 50% of the teachers and staff in place for Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3. Clear policies in place and increased opportunities for professional development. RD Coordinator accessible and RD Leadership team meeting regularly. Expanding use of RD practices in intense and challenging situations.
  - THRIVING: Whole school Restorative Discipline practices in place. All staff trained in implementing RD practices. At least 80% of teachers, staff and administrators using circles

and RD practices consistently at Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. RD practices and information consistently shared with students, parents, staff and community partners.

7) In a typical week in the last month, when an opportunity was presented, how often do you estimate your campus used the following Restorative Discipline (RD) techniques?  
[Options: Never used, rarely used, sometimes used, almost always used, unsure, unaware of RD technique]

- Circles with students involved in a conflict
- Circles for teaching content in the classroom
- Circles including parents/caregivers
- Restorative conversations with students
- Community building classroom circles
- Circles with school staff and / or faculty
- Circles to repair harm in campus relationships
- Affective statements and questions
- Restorative chats
- Impromptu, informal circles
- Family group conference
- Problem solving circles
- Circles for inclusive decision making in the classroom
- Circles for Tier 1 group instruction around current issues (like bullying, safety, etc)
- Circles for “check-in” and “check-out” in the classroom
- Sharing an RD resource among staff, such as a video, article or training materials

8) In your opinion, how true are the following statements about Restorative Discipline (RD) at your school?

[Options: Not true, Somewhat true, Very True, Don't Know. Then, ask in separate column: “I believe RD has the potential to impact this, but implementation is not far enough along”, “I don't believe RD will impact this”]

- RD has helped increase student accountability for behavior
- RD has helped to reduce in-school suspensions
- RD has helped to reduce out-of-school suspensions
- RD has helped to reduce expulsions
- RD has helped reduce disciplinary referrals
- RD has helped manage difficult student behaviors in the classroom
- RD has helped reduce some cases of chronic absenteeism
- RD has helped improve overall school climate
- Restorative practices have extended beyond Tier 1 interventions
- RD has helped impact issues of racial and/or ethnic inequalities in discipline
- RD has helped impact issues of inequalities in discipline for students receiving special education services
- RD has helped repair harm in campus relationships

- RD has helped increase the level of respect on campus
- RD has helped build relationships between teachers and students
- RD has helped build relationships between teachers / staff
- RD has helped improve how students resolve conflicts with peers and staff
- RD has helped improve how adults resolve conflicts with students
- RD has supported youth leadership opportunities in peer-led circles
- RD has helped the development of social and emotional skills of students
- RD has helped build a connection between the school, parents and community
- RD has helped increase the feeling of safety for all members of the school community

9) In your opinion, what has been the most successful impact of restorative discipline practices on your campus? [Open-ended question]

10) What factors or strategies have been most helpful at your school in implementing Restorative Discipline practices? [Open-ended question]

11) Can you identify any unique or specific conditions at your school that facilitated the implementation of RD practices? Some examples include (but are not limited to): new staffing structure, small school, complementary program like school-based mental health services, extra per pupil spending, innovative focus, etc. [Open-ended question]

12) What barriers have you experienced in implementing RD practices at your school or district?

[Ask to select all that apply, then if selected; ask to rate how big of a barrier]

- School staff/teachers not willing to engage in restorative practices
- Students not willing to engage in restorative practices
- RD strategies used inconsistently across teachers and staff
- Complexity in integrating RD in current Code of Conduct
- Not all students asked or encouraged to participate
- Not enough time for circles or other RD practices
- Not enough time to plan and coordinate implementation of RD strategies
- Lack of administrative support
- More training and coaching needed
- Funds unavailable for additional professional development
- Conflict with the values and norms about traditional discipline at your school
- Lack of support from an RD coordinator
- Unclear discipline policies for serious offenses
- Conflict or redundancy with other approaches like Positive Behavior Interventions Support (PBIS) or Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13) In your opinion, what has been the most significant barrier to implementing Restorative Discipline Practices on your campus? [Open-ended question]

- 14) What school-level support is most needed to improve the implementation of RD practices?  
[Open-ended]
- 15) What district-level support is most needed to improve the implementation of RD practices?  
[Open-ended]
- 16) In the next six months, what changes do you anticipate on your campus or district related to Restorative Discipline? [Open-ended]



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