

# Implementing Restorative Justice as a Step Toward Racial Equity in School Discipline

KATHERINE CUMINGS MANSFIELD

*University of North Carolina-Greensboro*

STACEY RAINBOLT

*Goochland County Public Schools*

ELIZABETH SUTTON FOWLER

*Goochland High School*

*The purpose of this multimedia research is to provide a blueprint for change that is centered on an alternative disciplinary approach referred to as restorative justice or restorative practices. First, we provide a short overview of the problem of racially based discipline practices in American schools. Then, we share the philosophical underpinnings of restorative justice, describe key components essential to its implementation, and provide links to videos that illustrate the successful implementation of restorative practices in authentic school settings. Thereafter, we offer what we believe is vital for institutional change: understanding the role Whiteness plays in disparate treatment and engaging in anti-racist school leadership. In the final section of the paper, we share specific strategies educators can use to navigate the change processes necessary to work toward racial equity in school discipline.*

The inequitable representation of racial subgroups in school discipline data has been documented for at least 2 decades (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), while the overrepresentation of Black students receiving school discipline extends back even further to nearly 40 years (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). This pattern of disproportionality is alarming in and of itself, but the knowledge that even one school suspension seriously curtails students' life chances makes finding a solution all the more urgent. The good news is that there is an alternative out there that is making a huge difference in closing the discipline gap, improving teacher morale, and changing the lives of the students and families.

The purpose of this manuscript is to provide a blueprint for change that is centered on an alternative disciplinary approach referred to as *restorative justice* or *restorative practices*. First, we provide a short overview of the problem of racially based discipline practices in American schools. Then, we share the philosophical underpinnings of restorative justice and describe the key components essential to its implementation. Thereafter, we provide what we believe is foundational for institutional change: that is, building understanding of the role Whiteness plays in contributing to disparate treatment, coupled with the need for school principals to use anti-racist leadership in policy and practice. In the final section of the article, we share specific strategies that educational leaders can use to navigate the change processes necessary to achieve racial equity in school discipline.

### OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

The data documenting the aforementioned inequities span across different levels of collection and are found in national, state, and local analyses (Skiba et al., 2014). Furthermore, disproportionality according to race/ethnicity is on the rise. For example, in the 1972–73 school year, African American students were twice as likely to be suspended as their White peers, while in the 2006–07 school year, they were three times as likely to endure this consequence (Simson, 2012). Additionally, national data indicate that in the 2000 school year, while 17% of students in U.S. schools identified as Black, this slice of the student population received 34% of all out-of-school suspensions (Kinsler, 2011). Almost 20 years later, the situation is so dire it is beginning to attract attention of lawmakers. For example, the Colorado State Legislature did away with “zero tolerance” policies in 2012 (Canarroe, 2014) and Carmen Fariña, Chancellor of New York City’s Department of Education, called for an end to “principal-led school suspensions” in 2015 (Berwick, 2015). In Chicago, a student-led group named VOYCE (Voices of Youth in Chicago Education) created Senate Bill (SB) 100, which requires a comprehensive overhaul of discipline practices across the state (Sanchez, 2015). Students met regularly with members of the Illinois legislature to help them understand “the devastating impact of exclusionary discipline... [for] those who are disproportionately affected...students of color, students with disabilities, LGBT students, and English Language Learner students” (Sanchez, 2014a, para. 1). After several years of work, VOYCE has celebrated the passage of new regulations that hold promise to ameliorate the overuse of exclusionary school discipline.

Though male students are more likely to be referred for school discipline than females regardless of race (Anyon et al., 2014), the inequities found in the data for African American students spans across gender (Crenshaw et

al., 2015; Morris, 2016). Skiba et al. (2014) report that the risk of an African American female receiving suspension or expulsion is five times that of a White female student. This pattern of exclusionary discipline for Black females holds even at the elementary level (Skiba et al., 2014).

Some may think that students of color receive harsher disciplinary consequences more often due to an increased frequency of misbehavior or the severity of their actions. Research suggests otherwise, however. For example, according to Sanchez (2014b), in 2013–2014 at least 8 of 10 arrests in Chicago Public Schools were for minor infractions that would not have constituted arrest in other settings. In fact, many studies hold racial inequities responsible for disciplinary outcomes even when controlling for the nature of student misbehavior, poverty, disability, academic achievement, school composition, neighborhood, and district (Anyon et al., 2014). While Black students are overrepresented in the percentage of expulsions and suspensions regularly, there are no data indicating that African American students behave worse or misbehave more often than White students (Maag, 2012). A national study instead found that Black students are no more likely to commit felony offenses leading to mandatory exclusion than White students (Fabelo et al., 2011). In addition, after controlling for over 80 other variables, African American ninth graders in Texas were 23% less likely than White freshmen to face *mandatory* exclusion, while simultaneously being 31% more likely to face *discretionary* exclusion than either White or Hispanic peers (Fabelo et al., 2011). In other words, White students were more likely than Black students to break more obvious policies such as fighting, while Black students were more likely than White students to face exclusion for subjective reasons such as impudence or violating dress code. Similarly, Skiba et al. (2014) report that Black students were treated more harshly than White students for the same infraction (p. 550), and Kinsler (2011) found that Black students in North Carolina were suspended an average of 1 day longer than White students caught fighting. In fact, a Black freshman's out-of-school suspension was on average 22% longer than a White peer's suspension when sentenced for a simple rule violation (Kinsler, 2011).

Anyon et al. (2014) propose two different issues that may be contributing to the overrepresentation of minority students in school discipline data. The first is *differential selection* of minority youth by teachers to receive office referrals. This referral is the first step in youth being sent to a school administrator, where they may be suspended for their actions (Anyon et al., 2014). Black and Hispanic youth are often viewed by teachers as more aggressive or threatening when compared to White or Asian classmates (Anyon et al., 2014). In addition, teachers tend to classify Black middle school students as more disrespectful or defiant than White peers. In fact,

across the country nearly 70% of African American referrals are for behaviors labeled by teachers as defiant (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). This general impression that students of color behave less appropriately than students that are White is an example of cultural racism: “Found in both individuals and institutions, cultural racism attributes values and normality to White people and Whiteness, and devalues, stereotypes, and labels people of color as ‘other,’ different, less than” (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013, p. 22). Such cultural racism may impact student selection for a referral from teachers who view a minority student’s behavior as too far outside of the valued norm; teachers may not even be aware of their own racial biases in this regard (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013).

The above leads to the second point of interaction that impacts minority representation in school discipline data: *differential processing* of the referral by the school administrator (Anyon et al., 2014). The conceptualization of these two points as distinct in terms of racial inequity is supported by a Denver Public Schools study that found that while Latino, Native American, Black, and multiracial students were all at a greater risk of receiving an office referral for behavior, only Black and multiracial students were more likely to be suspended by an administrator and also faced harsher penalties for similar offenses (Anyon et al., 2014).

In addition to the high correlations between race/ethnicity and exclusionary discipline, suspensions and expulsions have also been correlated to an increased risk of a student’s later involvement in the juvenile justice system (Carr, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Maag, 2012; Morris, 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). In fact, a school disciplinary referral was found to be one of the top three indicators of an adolescent’s risk of later being labeled a chronic offender, alongside lack of parental control and drug use (Fabelo et al., 2011). Each additional office referral in school increased the student’s risk of re-offense with the juvenile justice system by 10% (Fabelo et al., 2011). Alternatively, a student who received school discipline only once or not at all was found to have a relatively lower risk of juvenile justice system involvement at 6.8% and 2.4% respectively (Fabelo et al., 2011). In retrospective studies conducted with samples of youth already serving sentences in juvenile facilities, 61% had been suspended or expelled from school in the year leading up to their justice system involvement (Skiba et al., 2014). Similarly, in another study, surveys of over 500 incarcerated male youths revealed that 80% had been suspended and more than 50% expelled from school (Skiba et al., 2014).

The level of involvement with the juvenile justice system experienced by students excluded from school can vary widely in its intensity. For example, Fabelo et al. (2011) defined involvement as contact with a probation officer, which could be for a minor or a serious offense, such as one leading

to arrest or detention. These researchers found that a student in Texas excluded from school for a discretionary violation was nearly three times more likely to come in contact with a probation officer in the year directly following (Fabelo et al., 2011). Another study highlighted a significant number of youth who had never engaged in serious delinquent behavior until after their first suspension (Skiba et al., 2014). Findings such as these led Fabelo et al. to conclude that there is a need “to provide more effective tools and supports that can be applied early, to prevent repeated disciplinary involvement and stem the flow of children into the juvenile justice system” (p. 72).

The notion of students flowing from school discipline to the juvenile justice system has become so ingrained in both the research literature and popular culture that a consistent phrasing has emerged to describe it: the *school-to-prison pipeline* (Carr, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Maag, 2012; Skiba et al., 2014). This phrasing is used ubiquitously by change advocates, researchers, and politicians. Skiba et al. acknowledge that “strong empirical support [exists] for links between school-based disciplinary procedures and negative school and life outcomes, including juvenile justice involvement” (p. 547), but caution that the phrasing *school-to-prison pipeline* implies causality rather than correlation. These authors posit that school exclusion more likely starts a chain reaction of events that, at their end, put a student at higher risk of juvenile justice system involvement. For instance, exclusion has been linked to decreased engagement in school, which in turn has been linked to decreased academic achievement and a view of school as an unfavorable setting; these effects can lead a student to truancy and increased risk-taking behavior, which may conclude with contact with a probation officer (Carr, 2012; Crenshaw et al. 2015; Skiba et al., 2014). The authors, after reviewing the literature, found longitudinal evidence that supported this notion of mediating events occurring between school exclusion and later incarceration. In addition, many of the studies reviewed were conducted using a multivariate research design that controls for other variables. Skiba et al. thus concluded that data exist to support viewing the link between school discipline and juvenile justice system involvement in *causal* rather than correlational terms in some cases.

All hope is not lost, however. The positive news is that the research also illuminates that individual schools have the power to affect their discipline rate greatly. The policies of a district, the discretion used by school administrators, and proactive interventions can all positively influence a school’s disciplinary practices and mitigate the negative effects on students (Anyon et al., 2014). Given the negative impacts of traditional exclusionary discipline, the need for an approach that leads to positive outcomes for all students regardless of identity markers such as race/ethnicity is clear. Restorative practices hold promise for being such an approach.

## THE RESTORATIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Restorative justice used in the criminal justice system was the original inspiration for restorative practices being developed for school settings (Mirsky, 2011). Rather than focusing on punishment, restorative justice centers on giving voice to the offended and opportunities for offenders to make amends (McCluskey et al., 2008). Developed over the past 30 years, restorative practices in schools encompass many of the principles of restorative justice when responding to a behavioral issue but also include practices that are proactive in nature (Mirsky, 2011).

Simply put, there is not a single definition of the term *restorative practices* (Reimer, 2011). Instead, restorative practices encompass a multitude of positive behavioral support approaches that foster communication, mutual respect, and understanding (Mirsky, 2011). Under this approach, engaging students socially in the school community takes precedence over social control (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Though precise strategies for implementing restorative practices vary, they commonly share a focus on building understanding, resolving conflict, increasing mutual respect, accepting diversity, committing to fairness and equity, and promoting personal responsibility and accountability for one's actions (Macready, 2009).

When disciplinary infractions do occur in a restorative setting, this responsive approach to the incident differs widely from punitive disciplinary practices in two ways. First, the level of involvement of both the offender and the offended is much greater in a school with restorative practices. Secondly, the intent of the process is fundamentally different; it is aimed at restoration, not punishment (Kane et al., 2007). Following the incident, the issue is no longer removed from the context in which it happened and sent to a third party for a solution, as is the traditional model of school discipline. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) argue that the traditional practice of taking the issue out of the hands of the offended and the offender may actually undercut the ability of students to solve problems. Instead, restorative practices grow the skills of both students and faculty to make restitution, to reconcile, to resolve as they move towards a discussion of how to make things right (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). The restorative approach aims to build empathy and interest in others while also allowing all parties to freely express feelings of anger, fear, and humiliation, to name a few. The result melds accountability for one's actions with support for both offended and offender to reconcile and to reenter the community (Macready, 2009; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

### THREE-TIERED SYSTEM

Similar to a triangular public health model with three increasingly focused levels of treatment, Morrison and Vaandering (2012) conceptualize the elements of a school-wide restorative program as being tiered as well as split between two major types: Preventive (see Table 1) and Responsive (see Table 2). The primary-level components are those practiced universally. These Tier 1 elements are modeled by everyone within a school at all times, including non-instructional personnel. An example of a Tier 1 Preventive element is the universal practice of using affective statements or “personal expressions of feeling in response to specific positive or negative behaviors of others” (Mirsky, 2011, p. 4). Teachers, staff, and students can use these statements to humanize themselves and to create an open and welcoming school environment (Mirsky).

Tier 2 elements, such as a talking circle, are targeted to specific groups and in specific settings aimed at developing, maintaining, or repairing harmed relationships, depending on whether they are preventive or responsive in nature (Mirsky, 2011). Proactive circles<sup>1</sup> are a Tier 2 Preventive element used to build trust and create shared values and understanding (Mirsky, 2011). In addition, proactive circles scaffold a student’s readiness for responsive circles as needed in the future. Responsive circles, which are also Tier 2, but responsive rather than preventive, manage tension and conflict within a group or class and aim to repair damage (Mirsky, 2011). Responsive circles are used for moderate issues or repeated behavior affecting the group (Mirsky, 2011).

The restorative conference<sup>2</sup> is an example of a Tier 3 Responsive element and the rarest of the components experienced by students (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012): “Led by a trained facilitator, a restorative conference brings together those involved to explore what happened, who was affected, and what needs to be done to make things right” (Mirsky, 2011, p. 5). Regardless of the level of action an element falls under, three foundational keystones are ubiquitous in each: *interpersonal connection*, *structured and fair interaction*, and *inclusion of student voice* (Gregory et al., 2014).

**Table 1. SaferSanerSchools Preventive Elements**

Level of Action	Element	Description
Tier 1 School-wide	Affective Statements	Informal, respectful, personal statements of feelings and how another’s actions impact a person; humanize the speaker.
	Fair Process	Approach to decision-making that elicits students’ input when outcomes affect them; not synonymous with democratic process of voting, but does espouse transparency as to why decisions are made and respect for all opinions.
	Restorative Staff Community	Models restorative practices (affective statements, circles, fair process, restorative questions, etc.) to attain conflict resolution and to build healthy relationships.
	Fundamental Hypothesis Understandings	Cornerstone of all restorative practices; necessitates aligning actions with the belief that positive behavioral changes are most likely to occur in a state of high, consistent expectations where authority figures do things with (not for or to) others.
Tier 2 Broad-based	Restorative Approach with Families	Use of other restorative practices in interactions with families aimed at building transparency, respect, and meaningful relationships.
	Proactive Circles	Precede incidents and focus on preselected topics; can be conducted with any group that meets regularly; used to build trust and relationships, elicit input from all, and to establish common expectations and sharing. Ideally 80% or more of circles experienced by students.

**Table 2. SaferSanerSchools Responsive Elements**

<b>Level of Action</b>	<b>Element</b>	<b>Description</b>
Tier 1 School-wide	Restorative Questions	Informal questions that allow those impacted to be heard by the offender and place the onus for making things right back on the offender.
	Small Impromptu Conferences/ Circles	Involve two or more people involved in low-level conflict; break the cycle of escalation and require answering of restorative questions in front of each other, promoting expression of feelings and reflection on how actions impact others.
	Reintegrative Management of Shame	Anticipates that shame results when negative behaviors are addressed; actively listens and acknowledges sharing of shameful feelings and rejects negative behaviors, but not the person; does not dwell on shame once acknowledged, but moves beyond.
Tier 2 Broad-based	Responsive Circles	Conducted in a circle with no barriers; engage a group in addressing behavior that has negative effects on members and promotes responsibility for actions and making amends; opportunity to share feelings and plan for corrective measures.
Tier 3 Targeted	Restorative Conferences	Most formal of restorative practices; held in response to a serious incident or pattern of less serious incidents; involve a facilitator, offender, victim, and often their supporters (friends & family); highly scripted, eliciting input in a set pattern from offender, victim, victim's supporters, and offender's supporters; allow expression, then facilitate solution-making and re-integration of offender into the community.

## IMPACTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

With restorative practices being relatively new, formal research on its efficacy and sustainable impact is just emerging (Mirsky, 2011). Thus far, research has shown positive results in schools implementing restorative practices. For example, while some faculty reported resisting the implementation of restorative practices initially, they also reported improvements in staff morale shortly after implementation (McCluskey et al., 2008). Additionally, a decrease in the need for previously used external behavioral support interventions was discovered following the implementation of restorative practices (McCluskey et al., 2008). As an anti-bullying strategy, restorative practices have also garnered praise from teachers who rank it as moderately to highly effective (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Teacher-student relationships, too, are likely to be positively affected by the use of restorative practices. One American study across two large East Coast high schools found that in schools where teachers were more restorative in their practices, students reported their teachers have better relationships with students of diverse backgrounds, write fewer office referrals and were more respectful overall (Gregory et al., 2014). These same teachers also demonstrated less discrepancy across race and ethnicity in the number of referrals they wrote for misconduct or defiance issues than their peer teachers who were rated lower on their implementation of restorative practices (Gregory et al., 2014).

Overall, schools implementing restorative practices showed a clear reduction of exclusionary discipline over a 2-year period (Kane et al., 2007). The falling suspension and expulsion rates most likely contributed to administrators reporting restorative practices as highly effective (Kane et al., 2007). Research specific to the SaferSanerSchools™ model of restorative practices has also demonstrated a decrease in exclusionary discipline in a diverse set of high school settings following the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of implementation. Examples of this decline ranged from 50% fewer violent acts and serious incidents in 1 year in an urban high school to a 70% decrease in incidents of classroom disruptions and disrespect toward teachers in the year following implementation in a large suburban high school (Gregory et al., 2014). Data collected from a Minnesota district using restorative practices in all grade levels found similar positive results over a 3-year span (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Moreover, some studies show that schools with restorative practices have decreased the gap between White and African American suspensions (Gregory et al., 2014). Perhaps the “support, structure, and student voice... [inherent in restorative practices are the] key ingredients that have the potential to ‘humanize’ teacher interactions with historically stigmatized groups” such as racial minorities (p. 7).

In support of this statement, past research has shown that African American youth are perceived by teachers to be less defiant and more responsive to authority when the students believe they have been heard and treated fairly, two cornerstones of restorative practices (Gregory et al., 2014). This finding is perhaps not specific to just African American students, as Morrison and Vaandering (2012) assert that all people are found to be more cooperative when feeling respected by a group and proud of their membership. Still, “interventions that can equally improve the quality of teacher-student relationships across racial and ethnic groups may have potential to reduce the racial discipline gap” (Gregory et al., 2014, p. 21). The positive relationship discussed earlier between a teacher’s level of restorative practice use and students’ perception of a positive relationship

with them held across racial and ethnic lines and may indicate the appropriateness of the restorative approach for a diverse body of students (Gregory et al., 2014). The objective of proactive restorative elements is to establish and value every voice within the group. This is especially important as a student's sense of being valued and needed has been suggested by the National Research Council as a possible deterrent to later acts of violence (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

While transitioning from a traditional exclusionary discipline model to a proactive restorative practice approach is still relatively new to students, early findings suggest that elementary students experiencing restorative practices feel valued in their school setting and reap benefits. For instance, in an elementary pilot study, McCluskey et al. (2008) surveyed students who reported that staff was fair and listened after the implementation of restorative practices. When asked about restorative meetings, these same students reported meetings to be productive and that both teachers and administrators listened, did not yell, and treated students as equals. Additionally, these students also reported that they were able to increase their conflict resolution skills, which had a positive impact on peer relationships and led to fewer incidents of playground issues, referrals, suspension and expulsion, and need for external support interventions (McCluskey et al., 2008). Similarly, students at the secondary level report restorative practices invite them to share their unique perspective with the knowledge that it will be valued and respected in the classroom (Nesbitt & Clarke, 2004). Additionally, Kane et al. (2007) reported that students involved in restorative practices appreciated the time invested by faculty and staff in sorting out student issues. Finally, research by Mirsky (2011) reports that students learned how to take responsibility for their own actions through proactive restorative practices that foster positive relationships with the community.

### MOVING TOWARD INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

As positive as many of the early findings emerging from restorative school settings are, successful outcomes in these schools do not guarantee success in all school settings. Certain factors have been identified as indicating school readiness to employ restorative practices. While each school is different, school readiness is built on the multilayered foundation of creating an inclusive school culture, a positive school ethos, strong leadership, and strong existing support structures upon which restorative practices can be built. In addition, it is important to point out that most restorative programs do not include building shared understandings around concepts such as individual and systemic racism, Whiteness and White

supremacy, and how restorative practices can be a powerful form of anti-racist school leadership. This is a serious gap that must be addressed; otherwise, restorative discipline practices may become just another technical fix that does not get at the root cause of racial disparities. We believe that for restorative practices to have a lasting impact that goes beyond statistical overrepresentation of students of color, there must be a commitment from educators to be race conscious and dedicated to dismantling systems of oppression. As Theoharis and Haddix (2011) so aptly state, “When urban school leaders fail to see, hear, talk about, and act according to racial, cultural, and linguistic realities, any progressive reform or leadership efforts are hindered” (p. 1335). Thus, before sharing what the literature has to say about the step-by-step process of implementing RJ, we look to the literature on anti-racist school leadership as a foundational step before attempting to do so.

#### FIRST THINGS FIRST

McCluskey et al. (2008) state that the true base for school readiness to implement restorative practices is faculty recognizing there is a need for change. Zimmerman (2006) and Polka (2007) also agree that establishing a sense of urgency is essential to successfully implementing change in a school setting. We contend, along with numerous other scholars, that centering race and understanding Whiteness is the first step to not only recognizing a need for change but understanding the urgency of self-reflection as a foundational and purposeful act toward anti-racist leadership and teaching (Hayes, 2013; Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011, 2013; Yoon, 2012). In addition, it is essential to reframe issues around racism as a *White problem* rather than a *Black problem* (Hayes, Juárez, Witt, & Hartlep, 2013; Leonardo, 2002). That is, it is essential to acknowledge that racial division comes from the behavior of White people rather than the existence of Black people.

The hidden assumptions of the White problem created a particular social knowledge that racially marked being black (i.e., “Negro”) as outside the tacit White norm and therefore a problem for whites... Pointedly, today’s commonplace practices of police surveillance, housing segregation, job discrimination, and race-based ability grouping in schools reflect contemporary applications of the White problem enacted as U.S. society’s contemporary People of Color problem. (Hayes et al., 2013, p. 5)

Relatedly, White supremacy is a White problem, generated and maintained by White people; therefore, Whites are “responsible agents who need to get busy in dismantling this historical apparatus” (Juárez, 2013, p. 44).

But what is race? What is racism? According to Williams (2013), race is a social construct that people use to organize their identities and behaviors. That is, we partake in the process of teaching and learning the norms and values of the dominant culture via unconscious reiteration. Racism can take many forms but can be broadly described as prejudice or preconceived judgments based on skin color, physical characteristics, and cultural differences (Williams). However, since racism takes different forms than perhaps it did 100 years ago, it is sometimes difficult for some (White) people to recognize that racism is alive and well in American society (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013). To help make sense of racism, Jean-Marie and Mansfield (2013) offer a typology that illustrates

a multilevel definition of racism [that] expands our view beyond whether we are personally responsible for a lynching, for example, and urges us to examine how racism is materialized in everyday society within institutions such as our justice and educational systems. (p. 22)

Based on their interpretation of Jones (1997) and Seaton and Yip (2009), Jean-Marie and Mansfield define four types of racism:

1. *Individual racism* consists of personal and degrading actions performed by Whites toward minoritized peoples.
2. *Cultural racism* involves recognizing the dominant group’s beliefs and practices as superior to those of subordinated groups.
3. *Institutionalized racism* constitutes differential access to societal goods, services, and opportunities, which results in racial inequities for minoritized peoples.
4. *Collective racism* is when dominant group members work to restrict or deny minority group members their basic rights and privileges.

As one can see from the above, *individual* and *collective* racism are what most people think of when referring to *racists* or *racism*. Since we may never have consciously hurt or actively restricted the civil rights of a minoritized person, we may think we have not participated in racism. While this may be true for individual educators, one cannot escape other forms

of racism such as *cultural* and *institutional*, for example, acknowledging the role deficit thinking plays in classroom management and instructional choices with racism manifesting in the form of opportunity gaps and disparate discipline practices (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013; Mansfield, 2015, 2016; Valencia, 2010; Williams, 2013). Since much racism is unintentional and perpetrated by well-meaning professionals such as teachers and school leaders (Juárez, 2013; Williams, 2013), it is imperative to include discussions about *Whiteness* in our learning about the insidiousness of racism (Hayes, 2013; Juárez, 2013; Leonardo, 2002; Yoon, 2012)—or, to use Hayes et al.'s (2013) term, “unhooking from Whiteness.”

So, what is Whiteness? And what does unhooking from Whiteness mean? Leonardo (2002) defines Whiteness as “a collection of everyday strategies...characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions” (p. 32). According to Hayes (2013), people hooked to Whiteness avoid the above because to do so means acknowledging how their participation in Whiteness has helped create the milieu where racism thrives. Yoon (2012) would agree, noting that Whiteness in schools often includes unspoken assumptions “of how things are” where teachers do not discuss their identities or question White supremacy. McMahon (2007), using Helm’s (1994) White racial identity theory, explains typical phases people must go through to come to terms with Whiteness:

In the initial phases, white individuals often claim to be “color-blind” as a means of demonstrating what they believe to be an equitable outlook. In an attempt to distance themselves from racism and deny their privilege, whites may acknowledge the existence of racism while claiming that racism resides in those “other” whites and has nothing to do with them. There is a tendency to blame members of visible minority groups for their own oppression. These individualistic and limited understandings of whiteness function in schools to support the existing hegemonic structures and can be configured as consistent with outcomes based conceptions of social justice. Conversely, worldviews in the final stages of white racial identity awareness entail an understanding of organizational and systemic factors including their unearned privilege. Working from a critical humanist perspective that seeks radical change, they actively work to dismantle societal inequities. (McMahon, p. 687)

So, in the words of Hayes (2013), how do we “unhook from Whiteness?” Are we even capable of doing so? Theoharis and Haddix (2013) are confident we can. In their study of White principals who were successfully implementing social-justice-oriented policies and practices, they found that White leaders are quite capable of doing the necessary work around race, racism, Whiteness, and so on, but that it required a substantial sum of both “intellectual and emotional work” (Theoharis & Haddix, 2013, p. 16). Others (Leonardo, 2002; Williams, 2013) confirm the uncomfortable (and even agonizing) yet indispensable work involved with racial self-reflection. Jean-Marie and Mansfield (2013) point out that unless school leaders reflect on how implicit biases influence their own practices, they are not ready to deliberately engage others in conversations around racism and Whiteness, thus curtailing the potential power of well-meaning school reforms. To be sure, it is not enough to acknowledge the unequal, racially based statistics around the overrepresentation of Black male students in special education and school suspensions, for example. While detecting “whiteness-at-work” is challenging (Yoon, 2012), identifying and comprehending the Whiteness ideology behind disparities is foundational to dismantling them (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).<sup>3</sup> In other words, in order to rout discipline gaps, school people must first unhook from Whiteness. Thus, we assert that engaging anti-racist school leadership is an essential *pre*-implementation period that must take place before moving on to specific steps of restorative practices implementation.

## STEPS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Polka (2007) contends that organizational change is a continual process that starts with leadership. A long-term strategic approach is necessary, but organizational progress can be slow, so identifying milestones toward preferred outcomes in the short, medium, and long term is suggested, with the understanding that each school will have different needs and progress at different rates (Morrison, Blood, & Thorsborne, 2005). Also, it is important for school administrators to keep in mind that the implementation process takes about 5 years with specific indicators of change to keep in mind along the way (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Time Frame and Indicators of Change (Morrison et al., 2005)**

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Indicators of Change</b>
12–18 months	Gaining commitment. Changing dialogue. Pockets of practice. Improved statistics. Increased options for managing behavior.
12–24 months	Altered dialogue and processes. Alignment of policy and procedure. Increased skill development. School community commitment.
24–36 months	Embedding of practice at all levels. Altered operating framework. Reviewing policy and procedure. Creative solutions continue to emerge.
4–5 years	Best practice. Behavior change embedded. Cultural change across school community.

It is critical to understand and accept that restorative practices should not be forced upon teachers. Rather, school leadership must spend the first year to 18 months establishing buy-in via open dialogue. Morrison et al. (2005) break the implementation process down into five distinct stages to help school leaders manage the change process (see Table 4).

Stage 1, gaining commitment, is where the groundwork of establishing the need for change and creating buy-in and commitment occurs (Morrison et al., 2005). This step can be cultivated when fostering school readiness. Creating an awareness of the need for change can be done through several avenues, but data may be one of the most persuasive. Suspension and referral rates, attendance data, climate and safety surveys, and/or a review of school policy can be harnessed for this purpose. Morrison et al. strongly emphasize that the place to start is where “the energy exists” (p. 345). Once the data are shared and a need for change established, planning should not be a top-down decision but must involve key school-level stakeholders. McCluskey et al. (2008) state that restorative practice has its greatest impact when seen as a chance for faculty and staff to define the “kind of school they [want] and how they [want] to ‘be’ with their pupils” (p. 415).

**Table 4. Stages of Implementation (Morrison et al., 2005)**

Stage 1: Gaining commitment – Capturing hearts and minds	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Making a case for change                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Identifying the need (the cost of current practice)</li> <li>1.2 Identifying learning gaps</li> <li>1.3 Challenging current practice</li> <li>1.4 Debunking the myths around behavior management and what makes a difference</li> <li>1.5 Linking to other priorities</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Establishing buy-in</li> </ol>
Stage 2: Developing a shared vision – Knowing where we are going and why	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inspiring a shared vision</li> <li>2. Developing preferred outcomes aligned with the vision</li> <li>3. Building a framework for practice</li> <li>4. Developing a common language</li> </ol>
Stage 3: Developing responsive and effective practice – Changing how we do things around here	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing a range of responses</li> <li>2. Training, maintenance, and support</li> <li>3. Monitoring for quality standards</li> </ol>
Stage 4: Developing a whole-school approach – Putting it all together	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Realignment of school policy with new practice</li> <li>2. Managing the transition</li> <li>3. Widening the lens</li> </ol>
Stage 5: Professional relationships – Walking the talk with each other	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting open, honest, transparent and fair working relationships</li> <li>2. Using restorative processes for managing staff grievance, performance management, and conflict</li> <li>3. Challenging practice and behavior; building integrity</li> </ol>

Research shows that school leaders are crucial in Stage 2, developing a shared vision (Morrison et al., 2005). School leadership must help staff define a clear vision which includes short-, medium-, and long-term goals that address what the school is trying to achieve. Also, including a statement explaining why this change is important for the entire school community is highly recommended. Clear methods for delivery and measures of goal achievement also need to be established. Realistic, measurable objectives can include “data (e.g., reducing suspensions or office referrals by 10%), policy (e.g., balancing prevention, intervention and crisis management), staff development (e.g., increase support for staff struggling with discipline) and everyday practice (e.g., increasing the use of dialogue and problem solving circles)” (p. 348). These measurable objectives should be articulated to the school community, including students’ families.

Stage 3, developing responsive and effective practice, involves a focused effort on creating a range of responses to various situations and then implementing training for all school staff (Morrison et al.,

2005). Such training is likely to be well received, as teachers consistently request additional training in behavior management (Maag, 2012). Creating a set standard of restorative responses for the school and training all faculty members in these practices can lead to teacher empowerment when they find that they can implement these elements on their own. Conversely, writing an office referral may actually undermine a teacher's authority with students who perceive the teacher as having handed the problem off. The administrator's judgment and choice of consequences can also "undercut a teacher's authority within the classroom and become a bone of contention between managers and staff" (Morrison et al., 2005, p. 349).

In addition to the above, leadership can do much to support the implementation of Stage 3. For example, an administrator's public commitment, modeling, enthusiastic support, and investment in strong staff development have been shown to contribute to a successful restorative practices implementation (McCluskey et al., 2008). Providing training and professional development that is focused on the needs of the school site is particularly crucial (Kane et al., 2007). In terms of providing training, Kane et al. found that both internal and external experts can prove equally beneficial. The following year, McCluskey et al. found that when secondary teachers were trained by peers, particularly teachers within one's own department, there was a swell of interest in and commitment to restorative practices. A strong impact on staff responsiveness also occurs when a school's administration demonstrates a commitment to training and emphasizes time to review training (McCluskey et al., 2008). Administration also need to give performance feedback to staff, as it impacts the degree to which teachers implement new strategies and, therefore, may be crucial to a full and sustained implementation of restorative practice (Gregory et al., 2014). Thus, schools cannot just train at the beginning of the year; rather, implementation is an ongoing process.

Stage 4, developing a whole-school approach, includes aligning building-level policies and practices with the intentions and actions of a strong restorative practices program, rather than becoming just another add-on that may or may not mesh with the new theory of action. Policies on student behavior will have to shift from the traditional punitive-reactive archetype to the proactive and restorative model driven by restorative practices (Morrison et al., 2005).

Stage 5, developing professional relationships, is where words and actions need to be in step. "If schools are to develop a restorative culture, the professional working environment must also be underpinned by restorative philosophy and practice...this would be reflected in the

structures, communications and processes that engage staff in the everyday life of school” (Morrison et al., 2005, p. 353). Self-reflection and willingness to act on those reflections are a crucial step to Stage 5 and should include more than just teachers. Perceived failures are often pinned on teachers, when in fact many layers of implementation exist. Zimmerman (2006) also proposes that in any organizational change, there is often an implementation dip. That is, change is difficult and teachers’ confidence levels may decrease initially as they try new strategies. Thus, according to Zimmerman, it is critical that principals respond with the necessary feedback and reassurance and allow for continued practice to occur.

## CONCLUSION

While no educational program or policy is perfect—either in conception or implementation—we discern that restorative practices have enormous potential to close the racial equity gaps in school discipline. And we are encouraged by the relatively recent reports in popular media that zero tolerance policies are misguided at best. The ethical ramifications of disregarding the data and/or being unwilling to navigate often difficult change processes must be taken on by educational leaders at the local, state, and national levels. While research is relatively new and restorative practices are no guarantee for ending racist practices, it would be reprehensible to not at least give RP a chance. As Morris (2016) reminds us, “We’ve been doing prisons for over four-hundred-something years, and they *clearly* don’t work. So, let’s try restorative justice for [at least] one hundred.”<sup>4</sup> We couldn’t agree more.

## NOTES

1. An excellent example of a student-led proactive circle can be found on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdKhcQrLD1w>

2. An excellent example of a restorative conference can be found on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSJ2GPiptvc>

3. Please refer to Hayes (2013), Leonardo (2002), Theoharis and Haddix (2011, 2013) for a more substantive treatment school leaders moving the organization forward with these foundational principals. Also, consult Picower (2009) for a discussion of anti-racist work in preparation programs.

4. Quote is from Morris (2016), p. 232, emphasis in original, substitution added.

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KATHERINE CUMINGS MANSFIELD is Associate Professor at University of North Carolina-Greensboro in the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations. Mansfield graduated from The University of Texas at Austin with a PhD in Educational Policy and Planning and a doctoral portfolio in Women's and Gender Studies. Mansfield's interdisciplinary scholarship examines educational leadership, policy, and practice as it relates to identity intersectionalities such as gender, class, and race across P-20 contexts. Mansfield has published in a variety of venues, including: *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *Educational Studies*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, and *Teachers College Record*.

STACEY RAINBOLT is currently the Coordinator of Testing for Goochland County Public Schools' secondary schools. She also holds the position of Director of School Counseling for Goochland Middle School in Goochland, Va. Dr. Rainbolt is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University with an EdD in Leadership. Stacey's passion is taking both quantitative and qualitative data and using it to help educators create an environment of high structure and high support so that all students can achieve. Rainbolt is published in *Educational Administration Quarterly*.

ELIZABETH SUTTON FOWLER is the Director of School Counseling for Goochland High School in Goochland, VA, and she graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with an EdD in Leadership. Fowler has over 20 years' combined experience as both a secondary classroom teacher and a school counselor. She holds licenses in secondary English, gifted education, and school counseling. Dr. Fowler focuses in her current role on being an advocate for student voices and equity. She seeks to help other professionals understand that strong relationships with students, based on respect, can lead to positive educational, behavioral, and cultural change. Fowler is published in *Educational Administration Quarterly*.