



District of Columbia Public Schools 2024-2025 Restorative Practices Guidelines





Introduction to DCPS Becoming

Like districts across the nation, DCPS still has notable disparities in opportunities and outcomes, particularly for students of color. We know these disparities are not the result of innate differences. Instead, it is systems and practices which interfere with favorable learning conditions for all students. Therefore, we must transform our systems, practices, and mindsets to support all students, strategically removing barriers for diverse learners.

This transformative vision relies on every district employee nurturing the whole child and fostering an antiracist ethos within our educational ecosystem. Neuroscience demonstrates that when positive relationships and safe, predictable environments are in place, neural pathways have space to access the brain regions necessary for learning. Rooted in this research, our work elevates best practices in high quality social and emotional outcomes for diverse learners in our district.

Aiming to unlock our fullest potential as a district, we are embarking on a collective journey known as DCPS Becoming. Guided by the latest insights from the science of learning and development, educational neuroscience, and explicit connections between the learning needs of the whole child, DCPS Becoming fosters conditions for students to reach their academic, social, and emotional potential.

At DCPS Becoming, we are strategically and consistently:

- Embedding whole child/anti-racist practices in DCPS systems (IMPACT, Curriculum & Instruction, Policy and Professional Learning)
- Codifying school level practices that create supportive learning environments and developmental relationships, building a strong sense of safety, belonging and academic engagement
- Building staff capacity and adult practice grounded in research-based social and emotional learning methodology
- Reflecting and acting upon data metrics aligned with district-wide priorities for strategic improvement and effectiveness
- Collaborating with key stakeholders to ensure consistent implementation

In 2022-23, DCPS Becoming partnered with early adopter schools to leverage key findings in the science of learning and development and to codify the **DCPS Becoming Core Practices**.



Student Relationship Structures

Trust-Building Interactions

Family, Caregivers, and Community Partnerships

Expectations, Norms, and Routines

Co-Regulatory and Restorative Practices

Supporting Student Agency

Multi-tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)

These Core Practices support educators, leaders and other DCPS stakeholders in utilizing a whole-child approach in their school communities. The purpose of this guide is to illustrate one Core Practice: **Co-Regulatory and Restorative Practices**. This Core Practice outlines key practices that build positive school culture, relational safety, and a sense of belonging for staff and students, ultimately increasing learning outcomes.

Origins of Restorative Practices

Inspired by indigenous values, restorative justice is a philosophy of justice that emphasizes bringing together those who may have been affected by wrongdoing. Once together, community members seek to heal harm caused to the relationship by addressing needs and responsibilities.

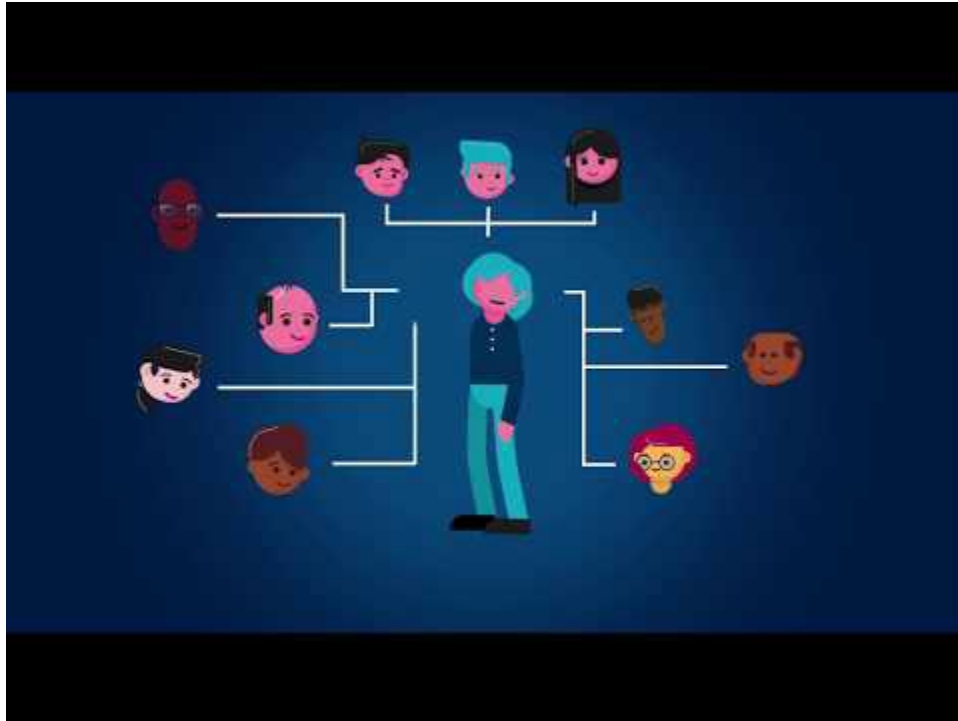
Restorative Justice: Rooted in the acknowledgment of historical and systemic injustices, restorative justice is a responsive approach that includes formal and informal responses to crime and other wrongdoing after it occurs.

Restorative Practices: Guided by a commitment to building inclusive and equitable communities, Restorative Practices include both responsive methods of repairing harm and proactive structures that foster relationships and a sense of belonging. Used together, these practices serve to prevent conflict and mitigate harm.



What are Restorative Practices?

DCPS Becoming works to foster beneficial school climate, supportive environment, and reconciliation through an umbrella of restorative practices. Under this umbrella, strategies include: building relationships, managing conflict, resolving tension, and repairing harm.



Why Restorative Practices?

Restorative practices are aligned with the DCPS Social Emotional Academic Development (SEAD) framework, an intentional approach that integrates social-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities and experiences into the academic day. Additionally, they provide a proactive, Tier 1 approach to supporting students in meeting the recently published Washington DC Social and Emotional Learning standards from grades K-5. [OB] These practices support development of inclusiveness, positive relationship, and problem-solving skills through circle engagement and conflict resolution structures. Fundamentally, this suite of practices actively confronts and dismantles systemic inequities and biases that impact students of color and other marginalized groups.

Through restorative practices, members of the school community:

- Have an opportunity to be heard, particularly those who have historically been marginalized or silenced.



- Understand the greater impact of one's actions, including how they may perpetuate or challenge systemic injustices.
- Learn to take responsibility not just for individual actions, but for contributing to a more equitable and just school environment.
- Repair the harm one's actions may have caused, with an emphasis on addressing racial and social inequities.
- Recognize one's role in maintaining a safe, inclusive, and anti-racist school environment.
- Build upon and expand personal relationships within the school community, fostering connections across lines of difference.
- Recognize one's role as a positive contributing member of the school community, committed to equity and justice for all.

Restorative practices support school safety by increasing emotional and relational safety, decreasing conflict, de-escalating volatile situations, and promoting a sense of collective responsibility rooted in equity and inclusion. When implemented consistently, these practices can also decrease the frequency of disruptions and disciplinary issues that disproportionately affect students of color and other marginalized groups. Restorative practices should serve as an alternative to harmful exclusionary practices, such as suspension and expulsion, which often disproportionately impact marginalized students.

“The underlying premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative, more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things with them rather than to them or for them.” (The Restorative Practice Handbook, Costello and Wachtel)

The DCPS Way-Transitioning to a Restorative Mindset: Shifting Policy and Practice

DCPS is committed to providing a framework that reflects a clear set of practices and values for all stakeholders and is grounded in principles of anti-racism and equity. The term *Restorative Practices* is used in lieu of *Restorative Justice* to capture a spirit of work that both builds positive interactions and equitable treatment as well as resolves wrongdoing. Restorative practices empower all participants, adult and youth, with the opportunity to reflect and respond to issues, understand how the problem arose, and recognize the impact on everyone involved, particularly those from marginalized communities.

The goal of this solution-oriented approach is to ensure that conflicts result in positive, equitable outcomes that foster a sense of justice and inclusion for all parties, while also challenging and addressing any underlying racial or social inequities that may have contributed to the conflict.

Restorative practices provide school communities the opportunity to build and strengthen relationships, reduce disruptive behavior, de-escalate challenging situations, decrease suspensions and improve social relationships. These opportunities increase both windows of tolerance among community members and brain



malleability towards pro-social behaviors. The long-term effects of restorative practices can improve academic performance, increase student attendance and create a positive school environment.

DCPS Safe and Positive Schools Policy Alignment

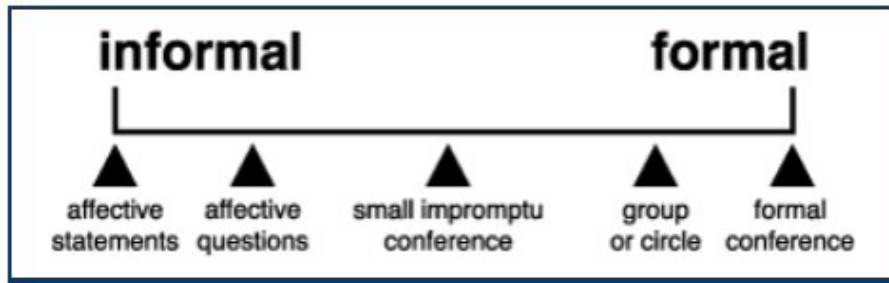
Restorative practices (RP) align seamlessly with the 2023 [DC Public School’s Safe and Positive Schools Policy \(SPS\)](#) by offering a constructive alternative to traditional punitive measures. Unlike conventional discipline methods that often focus on punishment, the SPS model of RP emphasizes providing support, repairing harm, and restoring relationships. This approach not only addresses the root causes of behavioral issues but also fosters a sense of accountability and empathy among students. By integrating RP into current discipline policies, schools can create a more supportive and inclusive environment that encourages positive behavior and reduces recidivism.

Adopted by DCPS as a grounding source, the Restorative Practices Continuum from the [International Institute of Restorative Practices \(IIRP\)](#) includes restorative approaches to handling conflict. The continuum provides a blueprint for scaffolding support appropriate to a range of situations. Circles are the most dominant symbolic strategy used to support healing, relationship building, and de-escalation; however, the continuum allows the facilitator flexibility in selecting an aligned strategy most likely to yield a successful resolution. The Continuum also offers proactive methods of building school culture, nurturing social-emotional development, and fostering solid relationships among educators and students.

The Restorative Practices Continuum

The IIRP Continuum defines five strands of restorative practices:

- *Affective Statements* which are brief comments about how others were impacted by the person’s behavior
- *Affective Questions* which are one step further, asking the wrongdoer questions like who was affected, how they were affected, etc.
- *Small Impromptu Conference* where you bring together a few people to talk about the incident, its impact, and what to do next
- *The Large Group or Circle* which allows everyone to have some say in what should happen because of the wrongdoing
- *The Formal Conference* which tends to be more structured and involves more planning and preparation



The full Restorative Conferencing model sits at the formal end of the Continuum and is largely used in cases where responsibility has been accepted and harm acknowledged. Restorative Conferences have been used for



many different purposes over the last decade and provide a structure for relational touchpoints that help increase belonging and connection. While some cases lead to full acceptance of responsibility and acknowledgement of harm caused, some do not. Some involve all parties to the incident while others have provided a service to one or the other party and their respective supporters. It is not always appropriate or necessary to hold a full conference for all incidents and the use of restorative practices at all levels, from informal through to formal, is encouraged. When restorative practices and language are embedded in the way we manage all conflict and inappropriate behavior, we are most likely to make a difference in the lives of those harmed as well as the lives of perpetrators.

Make it a Reality: Implementing Restorative Practices Schoolwide

Developing a restorative school requires all stakeholders to engage in the process, believe in the end goal, and commit to fostering an anti-racist, inclusive environment. Conveying a vision that prioritizes equity, justice, positive school climate and culture, and a solution-oriented approach will empower school teams to thrive when implementing restorative practices.

Each school should begin by developing a **Restorative Practices Schoolwide Vision and Action Plan** that explicitly addresses systemic biases and inequities. In collaboration with an assigned Becoming Manager and Restorative Practices Specialist, schools will utilize a **Core Practice School Assessment Tool** to align their vision and strengthen best practices. This process will ensure that implementation is grounded in anti-racist principles and is responsive to the diverse experiences and challenges within the school community.

Below is an outline of the **Co-Regulatory and Restorative Practices Walkthrough Tool**, which provides detailed guidance for schools on the major indicators and "look-fors" that should be present when this practice is fully implemented. The tool is organized into four key themes:

1. **Shared Goals**
2. **Proactive Support**
3. **In-the-Moment Support**
4. **Consequences and Restoration**

Each of these themes supports schools in creating a restorative and equitable learning environment, with a focus on ensuring every student’s experience is positive, inclusive, and growth oriented.

Co-Regulatory and Restorative Practices- Walkthrough Tool

Core Practice Theme: [Shared Goals \(for Responding to Conflict or Challenging Behavior\)](#)

Core Practice Theme	Definition	Indicators	Look-Fors
Shared Goals (for Responding to Conflict or	The general mindset among leaders and staff is that conflict and challenges are important predictable experiences and	Indicator 1: Adults see conflict and challenges as important predictable experiences and	1a. Adults identify student needs and assist them in finding their own solution or behavior alternatives aligned with the norms and



<p>Challenging Behavior)</p> <p><i>(click link to see associated rubric)</i></p>	<p>opportunities for growth. When conflicts arise, or shared norms and expectations are broken, they should be addressed <u>using restorative practices</u>, with institutionalized protocols that promote equity in a way that maintains and/or repairs trust and relationships. It is the shared responsibility of all adults to address conflict and challenges and guide students in building the skills to express themselves, take accountability, and advocate for what they need.</p> <p>Building on the collaborative social experiences within student relationship structures, the goals for responding to conflict or challenging student behavior (across all classrooms) are to build and maintain a safe, inclusive, and trusted community by responding to needs, conflict, etc. with consistent supports, consequences, and opportunities for acknowledging and repairing harm. Schoolwide prioritization of relationship building results in frequent reflection, collaboration and continuous improvement around the quality of adult-student interactions. Adults</p>	<p>opportunities for building students’ holistic skills.</p>	<p>expectations of the school community.</p>
			<p>1b: Adults regularly use and model restorative language.</p>
			<p>1c. Adults create opportunities for students experiencing conflict and challenges to deliberate on cultural differences.</p>
			<p>1d. Adults implement accountability structures that support commitments to work at relationship building.</p>
			<p>2a. Adults use normed and systematized protocols and processes for use of restorative practices to respond to moments of challenge and conflict from onset of incident to re-entry.</p>
			<p>2b: Adults respond to needs, conflict, etc. with consistent support, consequences, and opportunities for acknowledging and repairing harm.</p>
	<p>Indicator 2. Protocols for responding to conflict or challenging behavior promote equity and maintain/repairs trust and relationships.</p>		<p>2c: Adults engage harm-doers and those impacted in collaborative problem-solving to repair harm, build trust, and facilitate teachable moments.</p>



	consider both their own and students' perceptions of relationships, interrogate root causes of challenges, and work toward successfully building and maintaining trust with all students.	Indicator 3: Adults demonstrate alignment with the protocol to restoratively addressing conflicts and challenges	2d. Adults interrogate the root causes of challenges.
			3a. Adults use restorative dialogue, restorative circles, restorative mediation and other responsive practices to support students with navigating conflict and challenges.
			3a. Adults use restorative dialogue, restorative circles, restorative mediation and other responsive practices to support students with navigating conflict and challenges.
			3c. Adults have institutional protocols for responding to conflict and challenging behavior.
			3d. Adults provided a dedicated space for students to practice de-escalation or emotional reset in school and classroom settings.
			3e. Consequences should be evaluated based on whether they are reasonable, related to the offense, restorative, and respectful.

Theme: Proactive and In-the-Moment Support

Core Practice Theme	Definition	Indicators	Look-Fors
	Proactive avenues leverage community and		1a. Adults use affective language when addressing or



<p>Proactive and In-the-Moment Support</p> <p><i>(click link to see associated rubric)</i></p>	<p>relational trust that foster safe space to seek out conflict resolution or address issues are available to all school community members (e.g., available guidance counselors or school psychologists, peer mediation, community meetings, etc.). Students are clear on how to access these supports, feel comfortable advocating, and have faith that school will keep them safe and help seek resolution. Adults (both proactively and in a moment of challenge) learn and develop practices that infuse equity into their daily work to support providing co-regulatory support – modeling and scaffolding through their own tone, volume, body language, verbal prompts, etc. Adults use their understanding of how culture shapes communication, along with their knowledge of the school community, to avoid their own bias affecting how a student is supported or reprimanded. Students are never punished for their emotions – instead, they are acknowledged and validated, even if there will be an accountability conversation that follows (e.g., “I see that</p>	<p>Indicator 1: De-escalation strategies are used before seeking outside support</p>	<p>redirecting student behavior.</p>
			<p>1b: Adults, both proactively and in a moment of challenge, check-in with students and reinforce efforts.</p>
			<p>1c: Adults maintain composure evidenced by tone, volume, body language, and verbal prompts</p>
			<p>1d. Adults consult intervention plans or connections between physiological and environmental factors influencing behavior.</p>
		<p>Indicator 2: Avenues for support with conflict or challenges are seen as safe and trusted spaces by all community members.</p>	<p>2a. Adults include consistent spaces, supports and routines for practicing de-escalation or emotional resets in instructional and non-instructional environments.</p>
			<p>2b. Adults apply cultural competence when providing proactive and in-the-moment supports</p>
			<p>2c: Adults validate student emotions, providing students with resources to name emotions proactively and in moments of challenge</p>
			<p>2d. Adults make coregulatory supports visible and accessible to all stakeholders</p>
		<p>Indicator 3: Disciplinary structures support student inclusionary practices and</p>	<p>3a: Adults provide students the opportunity to take accountability for their</p>



	you're frustrated – working in a group can be really hard. Instead of yelling at your partners, let's ...").	consider individual student context	actions and ask for accountability from others without shame
			3b: Adults evaluate consequences based on whether they are reasonable, related to the offense, restorative, and respectful.
			3c: Adults create space for student discourse around disciplinary practices

Theme: Consequences and Restoration

Core Practice Theme	Definition	Indicators	Look-Fors
Consequences and Restoration <i>(click link to see associated rubric)</i>	Staff understand that healing is a process essential to restoring community and that challenging behaviors and/or conflicts are seen as symptoms. There is shared commitment to getting to root causes, which might include skill or relationship building, a change in the environment or adult actions, support for getting to resolution, etc. Consequences reflect inclusionary practices, are logical, and follow a set of equitable guidelines predetermined by the community (including families, caregivers, and students), but with room for consideration of the specific student context. Adults' ongoing work of reflection and learning	Indicator 1. Adults share the commitment of getting to root causes of conflicts and challenges.	1a: Adults engage in active and empathetic listening and perspective taking of all parties towards agreed upon formal consequences.
			1b: Adults enact consequences that consider the conditions or factors that surround the situation.
			1c: Adults use knowledge of students' backgrounds to understand the causes of misbehavior and develop plans to address behavioral issues.
			1d: Adults collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to ensure roles focus on improving school safety and belonging
			1e. Adults prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies, such as tiered supports, and promote social emotional learning



	<p>around issues of identity and culture (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, disability, language) support interrogation of content and training and ensure implicit or explicit biases do not interfere with students' being treated equitably in these processes.</p> <p>Harm-doers are held accountable for and take an active role in repairing harm (and ask for accountability from others), which is treated as a way to restore trust and relationships, not as public shaming. This process focuses on giving voice and resolution to all those impacted with the use of affective language and empathetic listening with the goal of restorative re-entry into community.</p>	<p>Indicator 2: Consequences/Disciplinary structures are logical, inclusionary and follow predictable and equitable guidelines.</p>	<p>2a: Adults ensure that clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences apply for misbehavior.</p>
			<p>2b: Adults utilize and monitor established re-entry processes, inclusive of rehearsal strategies for self-management and contact for supportive adult, following restorative conferences or exclusionary discipline.</p>
			<p>2c: Adults create discipline policies that include appropriate procedures for students with disabilities and due process for all students.</p>
		<p>Indicator 3: Adults have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to implement equitable and inclusive disciplinary practices.</p>	<p>2d: Adults create space for student discourse around disciplinary practices</p>
			<p>3a: Adults engage in professional learning focused on improving learning within a diverse, multicultural community characterized by cultural dimensions and context of the greater school community that may affect discipline.</p>
			<p>3b: Adults use proactive, data-driven, and continuous efforts to prevent, identify, reduce, and eliminate discriminatory discipline and unintended consequences.</p>
<p>3c: Adults interrogate content and training for issues of implicit and explicit bias.</p>			

Theme: Adult Capacity Building and Collaboration

Core Practice Theme	Definition	Indicators	Look-Fors
	All adults have the capacity and expertise to manage	Indicator 1: All adults engage in multiple district-	1a. Adults build multiple opportunities and time into



<p>Adult Capacity Building and Collaboration</p> <p><i>(click link to see associated rubric)</i></p>	<p>conflict and/or challenging situations with proactive and reactive strategies, and they effectively leverage additional support aligned to developmental relationships and supportive environment as needed (e.g., bringing in a school mental health professional or another trusted adult). All adult members receive regular capacity-building and collaborative support on these skills (e.g., trainings, peer observations, feedback, and coaching), coupled with the opportunity to do critical reflection and learning on the role of culture and identity and the impact of racial trauma and white supremacy in these practices. Adults at all levels regularly review data to ensure equitable implementation of supports and/or consequences to mitigate bias based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, disability, language, etc.</p>	aligned opportunities to build relational capacity	<p>the PD schedule to attend professional development on restorative practices.</p> <p>1b. Adults regularly engage in peer observation and collaboration to deepen skills within school context.</p> <p>1c: Adults, especially school teams, meet to align expectations and practices in restorative language and tools.</p>
		<p>Indicator 2: Supports and consequences are driven by regularly reviewed and equitable data practices</p>	<p>2a. School leadership provides targeted supports for scholars</p> <p>2a. Adults regularly review data practices to align with protocols and processes that promote equity.</p> <p>2b. Adults screen students to address academic and behavioral challenges</p> <p>2c. Adults respond timely to student behavior needs or gaps in progress based on frequently reviewing SEL and behavior data.</p> <p>2d. Adults frequently disaggregate data to look at disproportionality and factors that contribute to disproportionality, especially for impact on students in the margins.</p> <p>2e. Adults issue consequences aligned to student needs identified in student talks. (added)</p>
			<p>3a. Adults allot time for ongoing reflection and</p>
			<p>Indicator 3: Adults demonstrate ownership of</p>
			<p>3a. Adults allot time for ongoing reflection and</p>
			<p>3a. Adults allot time for ongoing reflection and</p>



		restorative practice skill development and implementation [previously look-for 3b]	improvement on use of proactive and responsive strategies to manage conflict and/or challenging situations.
			3b. Adults use common planning time to initiate or engage in peer feedback and support or collaborative projects related to restorative practice initiatives
			3c. Adults seek additional support identifying strategies for meaningful adult-student interactions and nurturing positive relationships from versed experts, as appropriate.
			3d. Adults provide and/or engage in professional development for school staff focused on reconstructing attitudes towards culture.

Key roles and responsibilities on a school-based Restorative Practices Team:

Role	Responsibility
Restorative Practices Lead (Restorative Justice Coordinator)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop expertise on the Restorative Practice MTSS model of support. • Develop expertise as an on-site coaching and support to school-based facilitators, teachers and parents. • Facilitate RP circles to prevent or decrease punitive discipline. • Facilitate the re-entry process if punitive discipline is warranted. • Facilitate RP with parents to model/engage them in RP circle opportunities proactively or responsively. • Facilitate professional development for staff. • Co-Facilitate with other school-based facilitators as needed and provide feedback. • Conduct routine class visits to monitor Restorative Practices implementation.



Administrator (Principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the RP Lead for the school. • Possess knowledge of the DCPS MTSS process • Inform the staff on the RP implementation process. • Attend data meetings and receive updates on the process. • Ensure all practices and protocols align the district’s standards.
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Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend RP Training facilitated by DCPS Learning and Development Science Division • Implement proactive circles in the classroom setting. • Implement responsive protocols of restorative practices when necessary. • Build student capacity about restorative practices and regularly engage them in the process. • Utilize restorative practices when necessary with parents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize restorative practices to help students defuse conflicts with one another (Tier I). • Communicate RP best practices with school staff
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively participate in proactive classroom circles. • Engage in conflict-resolution circles with peers. • Participate in creating shared agreements of restorative practices
Community Partner/Parents Other Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in community building circles. • Support the school by sharing the positive message of restorative practices.
Central Office Support Becoming School Manager/ Restorative Practices Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide coaching and technical support to the RP Lead and school community. • Share RP best practices. • Conduct school walkthroughs to and provide feedback on strengths and growth areas. • Consult with the RP team on the implementation plan and provide guidance as necessary. • Provide professional development to RP Lead and school-based leadership teams on RP and MTSS RP tiers of support.

Additional Resources



- [International Institute of Restorative Practices](#)
IIRP Restorative Practices Handbook [Restorative Practice Resource Project \(iirp.edu\)](#)
IIRP School Implementation Guide [SSS Implementation Overview.pdf \(iirp.edu\)](#)
- DCPS Becoming Documentary: [DCPS Becoming](#)
- **Turnaround for Children: Co-Regulatory and Restorative Practices**
[Toolbox | SE: Co-Regulatory and Restorative Practices - Center for Whole-Child Education \(Turnaround for Children\)](#)
[\(turnaroundusa.org\)](#)
- **Recommended Readings for Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices:**
[Restorative Practices at home](#)
[Restorative Practices for families](#)
[Restorative Practices Videos for Support](#)
“The Little Book of Restorative Justice”, by Howard Zehr
“The Little Bok of Restorative Discipline for Schools”, by Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz and Judy H. Mullett
“Circle Forward: Building A Restorative School Community”, by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pran

Points of Contact**

**For a listing of Cluster assignments and schools, click [here](#)

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Note to School-Based Practitioners

This document serves as an overview of the DCPS approach to Restorative Practices. For support and resources specific to your work in elementary, middle and high schools, please contact your cluster managers and specialists.