



# NCYOJ's School Responder Model Podcast Series

## EPISODE 2: RESTORATIVE APPROACHES



### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to part two of the Restorative Approaches discussion as part of the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice School Responder Model podcast series. We're back with Avery Irons from NCYOJ, Lesley DeMartin from ReNew Accelerated High School, and Alan Delery from the Center for Restorative Approaches.

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#### | Avery Irons:

ReNew Accelerated High School is a public charter high school in New Orleans, Louisiana serving 250 students who are over-aged and under-credited. In the first podcast, the discussion focused on ReNews, restorative practices, implementation processes, and lessons learned. In the second podcast, we will discuss the school's implementation goals and challenges such as reducing racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline and building staff buy in for restorative practices. Today, I'm speaking with two staff members integral to ReNews implementation efforts. Lesley DeMartin is a licensed professional counselor in the state of Louisiana and ReNew School counselor. Alan Delery is a facilitator and trainer for the Center for Restorative Approaches also located in New Orleans. The Center for Restorative Approaches provides training consultation and direct resources around restorative practices to schools, communities, and justice systems.

#### | Avery Irons:

What we're talking about the moment makes me think about why a lot of schools and jurisdictions are being drawn to restorative practices, and I think it ties back into the conversation about cultural competence and cultural awareness and understanding about the over representation of marginalized groups in schools. Overrepresentation in terms of exclusionary discipline usage, so Black and Latinx youth, Native American youth, boys, young people with special education. Can you talk about the relationship between restorative practices as an alternate that attempts to addresses over-representation in terms of usage of exclusionary discipline?

#### | Alan Delery:

Well, for one thing, when I think about that question, we have the idea that if you don't suspend and you look for other opportunities to be able to address the needs of students we have, any student, that you would reduce your suspension rate and you would keep students in the school. So we think it's really important for you just to have the idea that you are going to look for ways to address those needs of the students and not simply to suspend. In doing that, you also have to think about implicit biases that we might have individually. We might have the intention on not to just suspend, but if implicitly, we have these biases that there may be something wrong or an expectation that a student will act a certain way, we'll find ourselves looking for and catching the times that they are doing wrong, rather than identifying those times that they are doing what all students are able to do, and that's able to learn and build community with one another.

#### | Lesley DeMartin:

I think the big thing is talking about implicit bias. So throughout the years that I've been at ReNew, again, it's been a

transition, it's building a community and building a community that is willing to work with students in a nontraditional way, than the punitive school system. And I think all of that comes it's from that growth mindset and also the ability to have difficult conversations or diff CO's as the kids like to call them. As a school, I think our leadership team has done a really spectacular job of addressing implicit bias in education. Last year and the year before, we had professional development days with a organization called Overcoming Racism. And those were days where the entire staff was called, we do not have students, where we're really talking about implicit bias. We were talking about systems of racism and oppression in our country, around the world, and also here in our school system.

**I Lesley DeMartin:**

And I think, first of all, the presentation was fantastic. They also have a very awesome Instagram page. But I think it was so effective, not only because it was a wonderful presentation, but because we had buy in from the entire school who are really willing to have these difficult conversations and engage in topics that are uncomfortable. And I think, again, there's a difference about reading something in an article about exclusionary discipline, about suspension rates for our, Black and Latinx students, about X Solutionary discipline for our special education students. It's one thing to read it. It's another thing to talk about it and have it be open in the table, have it be on the table and discuss it as a school. I also think it was very important to have someone else, an outsider, come in and talk with the school.

**I Lesley DeMartin:**

So you have that you kind of have the separation between the school and the outside facilitator to have those conversations. So I just think that's very important. It was wonderful for our school. There were difficult conversations to have, and there were difficult presentations at times, but I think we all grew together as a community to be able to look at our own implicit biases and to also refocus on our mission of why we choose to work here, why we choose to work in education, and also why we choose to go with restorative practices instead of a more traditional, punitive dissonant disciplinary practices in other schools,

**I Avery Irons:**

What you just said, actually, if I'm thinking about it from the perspective of a teacher, who's got standardized testing and a classroom full of students who all have varying needs and varying rates of learning and all these things that I would have to do as this teacher, when we think about with restorative practices or restorative approaches, and when you think about addressing implicit bias, which is key, what advice do you have for teachers that have limited time and energy about implementing restorative practices? What advice or motivation rationale would you give them?

**I Lesley DeMartin:**

My advice is be patient with yourself, implementation doesn't happen overnight. Again, it's that translation of theory into practice. You don't wake up and you are miraculously a teacher guru who can handle every situation and is calm in all situations, I think what I try to support my teachers with, and frankly it support myself with too, is seeing the human, seeing the human and yourself. We're going to make mistakes, we're going to say the wrong thing, we're going to maybe react in situations when we shouldn't and taking those moments instead of beating up on yourself to say, "Okay, this is a growth moment. This is a moment where I can look back and figure out what I could've done differently." And I've also found, for myself professionally, the moments where maybe I said the wrong thing, or maybe I did the wrong thing and have been able to go back to a staff member, a student, or a family and say, "Look, I wish I had handled this in a different way," those are actually opportunities to open up those doors, where you show your humanness.

**I Lesley DeMartin:**

I'm taking every interaction for good or for, good interactions or maybe some negative interactions to take that as a moment to grow. And again, to show the human side of yourself. As a teacher, you don't wake up one day and it's not the matrix, right? You don't have everything plugged into your brain where you just walked into the classroom. I think trusting your gut, being able to learn how to regulate your own emotions and also being in a place that where you make a mistake, taking that as a moment where you need to reflect and learn how to react differently, or how to maybe look at the situation differently after some time and using that moment, when maybe things didn't go so well to repair harm and to use that situation to grow and continue to build a relationship with students. I would also say, just a quick plug, reach out to your friendly school counselor, your administration. If you feel like you need help, the support team is there to help you as well. So you're not in this alone.

**I Alan Delery:**

And I'd like to add to that. During our trainings, I always point out to teachers, usually at the beginning, that much of what you're already doing is restorative. You may have put that label or that tag or that name on it as restorative, but a lot of what's already happening, teachers are already building relationships with their students. A lot of teachers are already providing that care and support. And that's one of the things that we emphasize is are you giving the care and support that a student needs to succeed? They're doing that already. So don't feel like we're just putting a whole lot of other things on you, we're just really helping you fine tune skills that you may already have as you've been practicing and teaching, and an encouragement for you to be able to do that. Continue to listen, continue to do things with the students, and if you do that, you are being restorative without maybe the exact labeled practice that we may give, simply by listening and having an empathetic ear.

**I Avery Irons:**

So in thinking about the skills that your staff have developed over the years to be at this point, I want us to think back maybe a few years and, or over the years. And so Alan, for thinking about the staff at ReNew, what are the practices that they were able to buy into easily, or were there challenges in getting educators or other staff members to buy into working with this model?

**I Alan Delery:**

Okay, well, we've often heard that any type of change system, change management usually takes three to five years to actually happen. So year one is really getting the buy in and things. And the way it was brought up at the school is the two counselors at the time had come to our training, spying out the possibility of bringing restorative approaches to the school. So after they came to our training, they went back to the school and told them, "This is something that we think you need." So we had mental health professionals with the buy-in. And when we went to the school, it was evident to me that administration had buy in and already had a restorative mindset from the top end. As we went down from there, the culture team, that was there at the time, was tasked with discipline and they had their hands full and they were implementing what I would say less than a restorative approach as they were dealing with some very challenging students, they use more of the traditional approaches. Teachers bought in, but they knew that they needed a whole lot of support to deal with the classroom behaviors that they were dealing with as well.

**I Alan Delery:**

And we had not started, as I shared before, we had not started with that tier two support for teachers in the classroom until the second year and going into the third year. So they didn't have as much support. I was primarily working with the referrals that were coming in. What's interesting though, is I think about the culture team when I first started doing some trainings with them, I definitely felt a little resistance because they knew what they were doing. They had some effectiveness, they believed in some areas. And I remember some pushback that I received from them as they felt like what I was bringing in was challenging some of the practices that they were already using. And what's interesting about that, and we laugh about it now, is one of the culture team members who gave a lot of pushback, as time went on, he actually has become an advocate for restorative approaches.

**I Alan Delery:**

And we do laugh, he was the one who ended up getting trained at the school to do facilitate restorative circles themselves because our goal is to ween the school off of an outside agency and give them the capacity to be able to do it themselves. So this teacher was asked, not teacher, I'm sorry, the culture team member actually was trained to facilitate restorative circles themselves.

**I Avery Irons:**

Excellent.

**I Alan Delery:**

And the buy in was there, but that first year it was just them observing what I was trying to do. And it gradually year by year, I believe that it increased with the possibility of other people being able to implement it as well.

**| Avery Irons:**

All right. Excellent. As I was saying there are obvious proponents, there's a long history of proponents of restorative justice practices in the justice system. And that work has made its way into the school system. And so there are, in some ways it seems like the research is still behind where implementation actually is. So there are lots of schools, all around the country, jurisdiction states that are very invested in restorative practices. And so we're just now starting to get some of those intensive randomized studies back on the results. So what are your thoughts on some of the data that's come back that says that in some schools, student test scores have declined, especially or particularly for Black students. People thought that restorative practices would do more to reduce disparities in suspension gaps. And so as people put these two pieces together, how would you respond to people who say that they are concerned about using restorative practices because of potential declines in scores, or it's perhaps not as effective as they thought it was going to be in reducing disparities and exclusionary discipline usage.

**| Alan Delery:**

Right. There are challenges to implementing restorative approaches in schools. As I shared before, it is a three to five year process and when you start implementing it, if you're having trouble maintaining teachers or maintaining people for implementation, it could make it difficult. So we recognize that there are a lot of challenges. One of the articles that you had shared with me before pointed out that there are also challenges to evaluating the use of the whole school approach as a way of building, strengthening, and repairing relationships. I have been involved with the educational system actually since 1990 and evaluation has often been a challenge for us. Data collection can often be a challenge, effectively getting all of the discipline incidents that are happening actually being reported. So we struggle with that. As I shared before administrative and staff turnover, and then there are also the competing initiatives that can make it a daunting task to actually fully implement it with fidelity.

**| Alan Delery:**

As my experience at ReNew reflects, a system change takes work, a lot of work, and it is not unrealistic to expect that it's that three to five year process to establish, and also longer to be able to maintain with implementation. In the charter school, the landscape that we're in, in particular, as we are, as is the case here in New Orleans, it's not usual to see high administrative of faculty and staff turnover that even complicates the commitment to that process. That being the case, my question is, do we go back to the more punitive approach that does not have the best track record of reducing disproportionality of outcomes for minority students? We talk a lot about the social discipline window with restorative approaches and as the social discipline window two outlines, we have to think of ways of doing things with students and the families rather than to them and for them.

**| Alan Delery:**

We also know that trauma research has shown how re-traumatizing exclusionary practices can be on students with multiple needs. And a big part of the philosophy of restorative approaches is that we practice, I shared this earlier, we practice authentic curiosity to understand and address the needs that exist and that are created by a person's actions. So this helps people to reflect on their behavior and take responsibility for their actions, which often they're not able to do with the more punitive approaches. They're being told what's going to happen to them as a result of their actions, but not really finding out what the cause was and what the impact was on others.

**| Avery Irons:**

Do you have anything to add, Lesley?

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

I was going to say that with restorative approaches, we're building social emotional skills. And social emotional skills, there's not a standardized test for that. So I think looking at the literature now, sure, we can look at test scores, but test scores don't define a student. It doesn't define who they are, what they can achieve, their mastery, their ability to manage conflict. So I think, actually, that we need to be able to look at the implementation of restorative approaches in schools longterm to see how this approach has affected students post-graduation. I think that is my response to looking at some of the current research is that we just need some more data.

**I Alan Delery:**

And my final thought on that is as I expressed the challenges, I think we have to learn from those challenges that we've encountered. So when we are doing evaluation, we should identify what those challenges are and learn from them. But I don't want to see us throw the baby out with the bath water as an expression that you often hear, because you may know that those challenges exist, so just say it doesn't work. It's important that we learn. How can students learn if they are not in school? So what restorative approach is a big part of it is keeping young people in school and teaching those skills to them and not just putting them out. We're that safety net to help build them up. It's necessary that we hold children accountable. So restorative approach is not about not holding them accountable. We want to hold them accountable for their behavior. It is harmful when we deprive them of an education because of their behavior. We want them to learn from them.

**I Lesley DeMartin:**

I think too, what I like about restorative approaches, is I think it takes into account the developmental stages of students. Their brains are still developing, and part of that adolescent stage is to take risks and figure that out. And I think with restorative approaches, being able to connect your behaviors with a consequence, doesn't have to be an out of school consequence, but again, to build those social-emotional skills to meet students where they are so that they are in school, so that they can learn. And my other challenge would be being at school and building those social-emotional skills that is as important as learning English and math and social studies. So instead of saying that this is a separate thing, in my opinion, it's not. It's the way that we meet our developmental needs of our students, as well as their academic needs in the classroom.

**I Avery Irons:**

Yeah. I appreciate both of your holistic approaches to educating young people and the recognition that schools are increasingly, or maybe they always have, but in our lifetime schools are definitely being charged in our communities with supporting the growth of young people beyond just academic learning and increasing attention to social and emotional learning and the development of skills that help them outside of the schoolhouse, and in their communities, and in their future careers. And so my last question is we started off just talking about how the National Center for Youth Opportunity just has started working with both of your organizations on building connections to behavioral health supports in the community for students as they were deemed necessary. So I just wanted to see if you could talk for a moment about the interplay of these two things that ReNew has been working on this restorative approaches integration, and also this School Responder Model work to connect students, identify students that may have needs and connect them to supports either at ReNew or in the community.

**I Lesley DeMartin:**

What I've noticed about connecting students to outside service referrals, it's something that I would just do. And I would have a running list in my head, again, in that reactive moment, "Student needs this, make that referral right away." And what I have found actually, by being a little bit more organized and being a little bit less reactive, I've been able to strengthen my relationships with community partnerships. So that's the referral process goes a little bit quicker and that community supports are actually a little bit more willing to come into the school and meet a student for the first time and get them connected versus going through the whole referral process. So I think for me, it's been really helpful to get more organized, figure out the things that we're actually doing, and that in a way allows us to be a little bit more restorative. Instead of being reactive, we're being proactive. I think that's the phrase that we've come back through a lot, instead of waiting for something to happen, being very aware of who's in the building.

**I Lesley DeMartin:**

I think also capitalizing on our strengths with our advisory support system and our culture team support system of being able to meet students where they are and have really open and honest conversations about what they need. I think, personally, part of what we've done with the School Responder Model is when students are transferring in mid year, being able to get a really good snapshot of who they are, where they came from, and what their needs are. We're unique in our school setting, where we accept students year round. So again, instead of being in that reactive mindset, being always proactive, trying to figure out what students need versus just designing for them what they might need in an academic setting.

**I Alan Delery:**

And I wanted to just want to add to what I think the benefit of having been involved with the School Responder Model project, was the school was already doing restorative approaches. It was really good to have another national organization come in and

say, “Yes, restorative approaches are important.” So it really strengthened what was already happening in terms of restorative approaches at the school. I also think one of the products that we created was that flow chart that Lesley mentioned, that flow chart was a big tool. We’ve modified it several times, but to put something in writing and then modify it when we saw something needed to be changed to it, it’s not something that is just stagnant. I’ve had schools put plans together and they just sit on the shelf after, but we created this flow chart and it’s living and we’re working on it, has been tremendous.

**| Alan Delery:**

The other part, which Lesley mentioned, was the universal screener. They didn’t have that before, but being able to get the support of policy research, and your support of getting the universal screener was a big help. The last thing that we’re still working on, but your emphasis on the family engagement really helped us when we went to the training in New York, just to have that emphasis being put back on us and give us some other possibilities of what could be done with family engagement really was, I’m saying inspiring, but it was just putting it back in front of us again, to know we have some work to do that is a hard one. We found out we weren’t the only school that struggled with family engagement, but there were some good strategies that were presented then that we could take and bring back to the school.

**| Avery Irons:**

Thank you both so much for your time and expertise.

**| Alan Delery:**

Thank you.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

Well, thank you so much.

## CONCLUSION

Thank you to our listeners and to our special guests. To learn more about ReNew Accelerated High School, you can visit their website at [rhs.ReNewschools.org](https://rhs.ReNewschools.org). The Center for Restorative Approaches can be found online at [centerforrestorativeapproaches.org](https://centerforrestorativeapproaches.org). To access videos from the family engagement seminar mentioned, view sample flow charts like the one discussed in this podcast, and for more School Responder Model resources, take a look at the School Responder Model virtual toolbox at [srm.policyresearchinc.org](https://srm.policyresearchinc.org).