Education Innovation and Research Grant: Culturally Responsive Restorative Practices
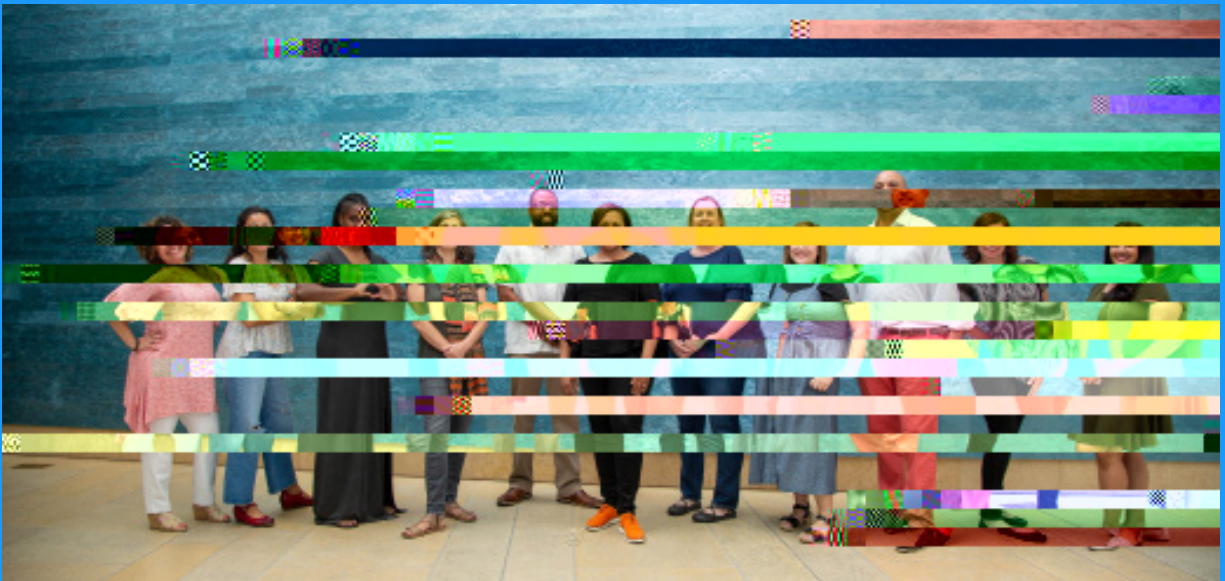
Educational research has well documented the association between exclusionary discipline practices (i.e., in-school or out-of-school suspensions) and academic and developmental outcomes. Studies have found that exclusionary discipline is associated with greater academic disengagement, lower academic achievement, greater risk of dropping out, and greater likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system (Skiba et al., 2014). Notably, students who attended schools with more frequent use of exclusionary discipline were more likely to have later involvement in the criminal justice system as adults (e.g., Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019).

Spanning back to the 1970s, numerous studies have documented the longstanding over-representation of students of color in discipline data (see Skiba et al., 2011). Austin Independent School District (AISD) discipline data have mirrored these trends in recent years. During the 2019–2020 school year, Black and Latinx middle school students were 5.4 times and 2.7 times more likely, respectively, to experience exclusionary discipline than their White peers. While research indicates male students comprise the majority of exclusionary discipline incidents, Black female middle school students in AISD were 8.0 times more likely to experience exclusionary discipline than their White female peers in 2019–2020. Within this context, culturally responsive restorative practices (CRRP) were adapted by Dr. Angela Ward from the popularized restorative justice and restorative practices approaches to counteract the social, cultural, and historical inequities that continue to prevent academic and developmental success for all students.

What are culturally responsive restorative practices?

CRRP provides schools with a framework for cultivating a positive,   o

through collaborative and shared planning and decision making.

- **Restorative practices (RPs):** Rooted in the traditions of indigenous peoples, restorative practices are used to build trusting relationships and social harmony. RPs recognize that a strong relational foundation is necessary to repair harm and, that conflict and tension are normal and natural and are resolved through processes that strengthen relationships, maintain trust, hold parties accountable, repair harm, and contribute to harmony. RPs are tiered as follows:

  - **Universal** (tier 1): Educators proactively build and universally reaffirm relationships as a means of developing the social and emotional skills of the self and students.

  - **Targeted** (tier 2): When conflict affects others in the school community, educators employ targeted interventions to repair relationships.

  - **Intensive** (tier 3): When conflict has a serious impact on multiple members of the school community, educators use responsive and intensive levels of intervention involving agreed-upon stakeholders, including district and community supports, to repair and rebuild relationships.

Restorative practices associates (RPAs) have supported Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant schools since the beginning of 2018–2019 through a mixture of relationship building, conflict resolution, coaching, professional learning facilitation, restorative and community-building circle facilitation, student leadership development and community building, mediation and conflict resolution, and numerous other duties, as needed.

The following sections summarize preliminary data from participating schools for the 2019–2020 school year—the second of 4 years of CRRP implementation and support.

A key leverage point for establishing a culturally responsive, restorative school culture is to encourage a restorative response to student conflict and behavior. Rather than relying on exclusionary discipline (i.e., removal from the classroom) as the default response to conflict/behavior, a restorative response emphasizes building community and trust, repairing harm, taking accountability for one's actions, and providing all involved with the conflict or behavior an opportunity to discuss and cultivate a shared understanding of different perspectives.

Table 1 details the use of exclusionary discipline at CRRP schools. To account for the shorter in-person school year in 2019–2020, a new metric—exclusionary discipline incidents per in-person school day—was calculated to determine how frequently schools were using exclusionary discipline before ceasing on-campus instruction. Based on this metric, Burnet and Dobie students experienced exclusionary discipline at rates 38% and 75% higher than those of the previous year and well above the

The report includes data from annual surveys conducted by AISD to assess perceptions of the AISD experience. Survey results are based on a sample of students, staff, and families. When using a sample to make inferences about a population, interpret results with caution. To interpret the sample data cautiously, researchers use the following information to construct an interval that describes the range within which results for the population are likely to fall:

population size: the total number of students
sample size: the number of survey respondents
confidence interval (CI): 40

The 95% CI is commonly used to make inferences about a population. For example, based on a sample of 136 students from Barrington (Table 2), we can be 95% confident that the true mean agreement with the statement "Students at my school follow the rules" is between 3.1 and 3.3 (on a scale of 1–4) for all students at Barrington.

AISD administers student, staff, and family surveys every spring to gather a variety of perspectives about the overall school experience. Survey results are used for campus planning and improvement, goal setting, and broader strategic planning efforts by district administrators. As mentioned earlier, response rates for the Student Climate Survey were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with four CRRP elementary schools (Blanton, Blazier, Cook, and Pickle) unable to gather a representative sample of students to respond to the survey. As such, no comparative analysis is included for these schools. Data for Blazier are not included, due to only one recorded student survey response.

Of the two CRRP elementary schools with adequate response rates to the Student Climate Survey, Barrington students felt substantially more positive about their school climate than they did in the previous school year (Table 2). Barrington students were signif cantly more comfortable interacting with school staff (noted in green), compared with the elementary school average. Similarly, Becker students indicated above-average perceptions of school climate for four items listed in Table 2, though these were unchanged from the previous school year.

Table 2

Students' Perceptions of School Climate at CRRP Elementary Schools

2019–2020 Student Climate Survey	95% CI of the mean					
	Barrington (i = 152)	Becker (i = 165)	Blanton* (i = 75)	Cook* (i = 27)	Pickle* (i = 111)	ES AVG (= 13174)
Students at my school follow the school rules.	31–33	31–33	27–30	26-34	30-33	31
I feel safe at my school.	36-38	37–39	31–36	31–37	33-37	36
Students at my school treat teachers with respect.	33-35	33-35	27–31	28-35	31–34	33
My classmates behave the way my teachers want them o	30-32	29-30	25-28	28-35	27–31	30
Adults at my school listen to student ideas and opinions.	37–38	35-37	33-36	30-37	31–35	35
Adults at my school treat all students fairly.	36-38	37–38	35-37	31–39	33-37	36
It is easy for me to talk about my problems with adults at my school.	30-33	30-32	25-30	22-32	26-30	4
I say "no" to friends who want me to break the rules.	35-37	35-37	33-37	24-36	31–36	35
If I get angry with a classmate, we can talk about it and make it better.	31–34	32-35	29-33	26-35	28-32	31

Source. AISD Student Climate Survey.
Note. Results for Blazier were not available due to inadequate sample size. Survey response options in cluded (1) never, (2) a little of the time, (3) sometimes, (4) a lot of the time, and don't know. Responses of *don't know*   3

As detailed in Table 3, students' perceptions of school climate at CRRP middle schools were largely unchanged from the previous school year and remained comparable to middle school averages. Similar to last year, students at Burnet and Dobie indicated below-average perceptions of school safety and rule following among peers, while Garcia students' perceptions of school staff were consistently above the middle school average.

Table 3

Students' Perceptions of School Climate at CRRP Middle Schools

			95% CI of the mean
2019–2020 Student Climate Survey item			

12.9

Much of the work done by RPAs over the past 2 school years has focused on cultivating staff's cultural and racial competence—the understanding and recognition that one's personal biases, values, beliefs, and lived experiences can negatively influence one's interactions, judgments, beliefs, and behaviors if unchecked through critical self-reflection. Within the context of public education, the cumulative impact of decisions made based on one's unchecked biases, values, beliefs, and experiences often directly contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline by influencing how school staff interact with students of color. While RPAs continued to build relationships with school staff in 2019–2020, they also began facilitating professional learning opportunities aimed at encouraging critical self-reflection and further developing cultural and racial competence. Fifty-nine percent of staff at EIR campuses (n = 389) participated in CRRP-related professional learning opportunities during the 2019–2020 school year (see sidebar for session descriptions).

Creating a culturally responsive restorative school culture is theorized to correspond with more positive perceptions of respectful behavior, felt safety, and the overall school climate, as well as to improve students' academic performance and social and emotional learning (SEL) competence. However, staff's perceptions can be influenced by a variety of factors, including principal leadership and staff turnover. Notably, Garcia and Cook experienced principal turnover during the 2019–2020 school year, while Becker, Blanton, and Pickle have new principals for the 2020–2021 school year. Consequently, perceptions of principal leadership may have changed as a result of turnover rather than as a result of any work related to CRRP.

As detailed in Table 4, staff at Becker and Blazier continued to report more positive perceptions of school climate compared with the elementary school average, with small but meaningful increases in staff's perceptions that Becker's discipline practices promoted SEL and that Blazier was a good place to work and learn. Conversely, staff at Blanton and Cook reported meaningfully lower perceptions of school climate than in the previous year. Staff at Blanton indicated less agreement with the statement that the principal modeled SEL competence, while staff at Cook reported lower perceptions of school climate across four of five items.

At CRRP middle schools (Table 5), Mendez staff reported meaningful improvements in school climate across all five survey items, two of which were the only items to exceed the middle school average for CRRP schools. Staff at Burnet reported a meaningful increase in their perceptions that the principal modeled SEL competence in daily interactions, while staff at Garcia reported a meaningful decrease in their perceptions that the principal modeled SEL competence in daily interactions. As noted earlier, principal turnover during the 2019–2020 school year may have been a contributing factor to this decline.

Professional Learning Opportunities

Beyond Diversity

Participants are introduced to courageous conversations and a foundation for deinstitutionalizing racism and eliminating racial achievement disparities.

Cultural Proficiency: The 6ᵗ >

Participants learn about the relationship between educational equity and cultural proficiency—a way of being.

How Did We Get Here?

Participants examine their personal lens with respect to implicit bias, equity, cultural proficiency, inclusiveness, and restorative practices.

Isolating Race

Participants examine the personal, local, and immediate impacts of race; reflect on multiple perspectives/experiences; and gain an understanding of the historical impacts of institutional racism on AISD.

It's Not Discipline: CRRP 101

Participants learn about the purpose of CRRP, how systemic racism contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, and how to disrupt the pipeline.

Speak Up

Participants practice identifying and interrupting biased language and stereotypes.

White Fragility

Participants examine the presence and role of Whiteness in American society, explore White racial identity and cultural norms in schools, and practice strategies for talking about race.

Table 4.

Staff's Perceptions of School Climate at CRRP Elementary Schools

2019-2020 Staff Climate Survey item	95% CI of the mean						
	Barrington ($i = 47$)	Becker ($i = 39$)	Blanton ($i = 40$)	Blazier ($i = 58$)	Cook ($i = 53$)	Pickle ($i = 33$)	ES AVG (= 3781)
Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.	31–35	36-39	31–36	37–39	27–32	30-37	35
My principal models social and emotional competence in the way he/she deals with students and faculty.	31–37	38-40	25-33	36-39	29-34	30-37	34
All campus staff interact with one another in a way that models social and emotional competence.	31–35	35-38	30-35	30-35	28-32	27–34	33
This school's discipline practices promote social and emotional learning (e- μ e- μ eelrom							

Tables 6 and 7 display parents' and caregivers' perceptions of their child's school climate for the 2019–2020 school year. Perceptions were largely unchanged at CRRP elementary schools. Barrington parents continued to have above-average perceptions of their child's feelings about school and respectful interactions with classmates, while parents at Cook and Blanton indicated below-average perceptions about certain aspects of their child's school experience. Relative to other CRRP elementary schools, Pickle had notably fewer responses, which resulted in wider conf dence intervals.

Table 6

Parents' and Caregivers' Perceptions of School Climate at CRRP Elementary Schools

2019-2020 Parent Survey item	95% CI of the mean						
	Barrington (i = 118)	Becker (i = 198)	Blanton (i = 188)	Blazier (i = 140)	Cook (i = 119)	Pickle (i = 45)	ES AVG (= 11542)
My child attends school in a safe learning environment.	35-38	36-37	34-36	34-37	32-35	33-37	36
My child likes going to school.	37–39						

= small decrease from previous school year, as measured by Cohen's *d* > .3

Student attendance rates, as displayed in Table 8, were calculated by reference to the percentage of total days of in-person attendance. For 2019–2020, attendance rates exclude all school days that occurred after AISD shifted to a fully virtual learning environment on March 13, 2020. Therefore, no longitudinal analysis of attendance rates is included here. Based on available data through March 13, 2020, student attendance at Burnet, Garcia, and Mendez continued to lag behind the middle school average. Numerous research studies have found that missing school was associated with lower academic performance, increased risk of dropping out, and reduced