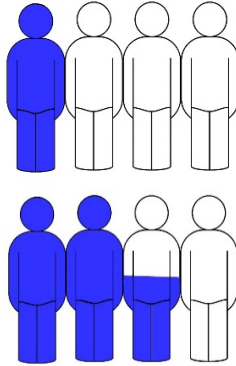


## Restorative Practices (RP) show promise to improve systemic equity and positive school and district culture

School climate and systemic equity are inextricably [linked](#). When students experience racially inequitable school discipline, their sense of connection, belonging and engagement is [negatively impacted](#). Disproportionality in student discipline is one of [many potential areas that RP can impact](#). Such disproportionality is a key focus of RP impact in SPPS because in 2016, the year

prior to RP implementation beginning in 6 schools, Black students across SPPS experienced disproportionate rates of school discipline in general and specifically in rates of dismissals for defiance of authority. Defiance of authority infractions are more often subjective and discretionary, whether in written guidance or educator practice, and can be especially stigmatizing for students.



*1 of 4 SPPS students in 2016 were Black*

*2.6 of 4 SPPS students dismissed for defiance of authority in 2016 were Black*

### How can RP interrupt these patterns?

The following narratives, from a SPPS middle school implementing RP over 5 years, contrast stories of what behavioral responses and related accountability strategies might look like when schools shift from focusing on overt behavior to underlying student needs, before and after RP.

#### Punitive Accountability (before RP)



Student receives multiple behavior reminders and is viewed as being intentionally disruptive.



Teacher, frustrated, asks student to leave class and go to the office.



Intervention specialist calls parent after student gets angrier and more frustrated during intervention attempts.



Student yells at assistant principal and parent, and is dismissed for the rest of the day.



A student is struggling in class to focus and be engaged.

#### Relational Accountability (RP)



Teacher asks student how they are doing and whether they are able to focus.



Teacher invites student to the RP space where they express their needs and feelings.



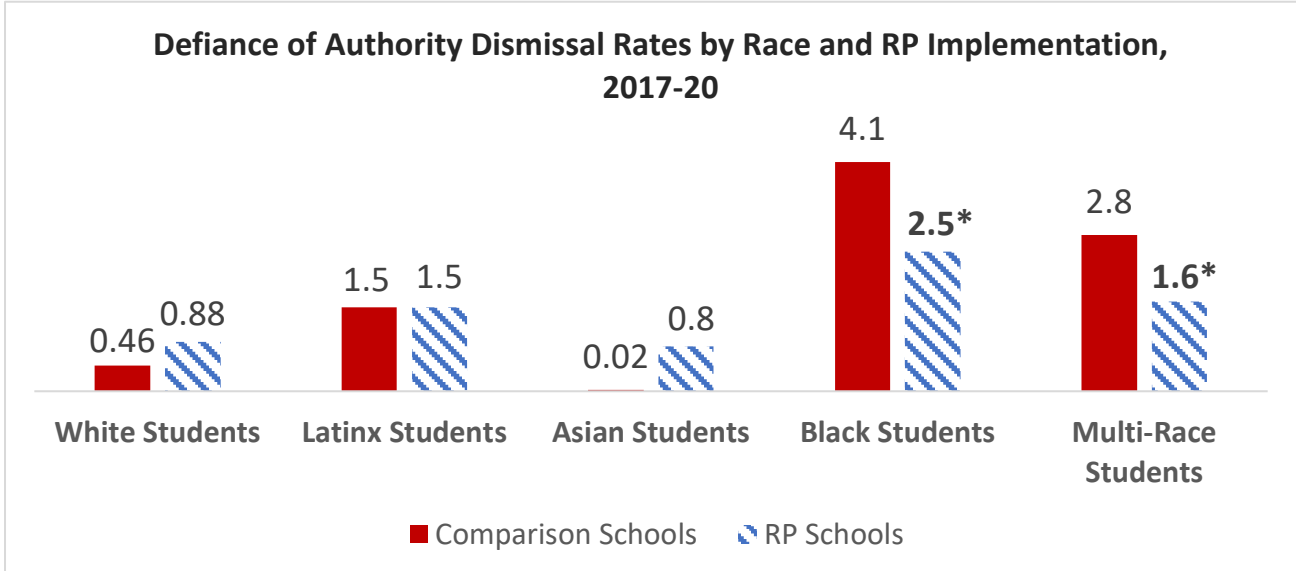
Teachers stop by to check-in and work one-on-one as able.



Teachers informed of and acknowledge that student will benefit from flexibility for emotional needs.

To interrupt patterns of inequity, new approaches to accountability must happen consistently. The University of Minnesota RP evaluation team analyzed discipline data from the 5 original RP pilot sites that were able to engage in sustained, school-wide change efforts. We worked with SPPS partners to select a group of 12 comparison schools that mirrored the 5 RP schools demographically and in disciplinary outcomes prior to implementation.

We found that these 5 RP schools have narrowed the discipline disparity between Black and non-Black students for defiance of authority dismissals (Figure 1). For Black and Multi-Race students, dismissal rates for defiance are lower in RP schools than comparison schools. A decline in rate from 4.1% to 2.5% is indicative of a sizable **40% decline in defiance of authority dismissals for Black students**. Particularly for Black students, RP schools appear to be systematically utilizing alternative strategies to address incidents that less frequently include exclusionary discipline.



\* The asterisks denote a racial group’s RP school rate is statistically different from that same racial group in comparison schools (e.g. the difference between RP schools and comparison schools is statically significant for Multi-race and Black students). Black students are still experiencing defiance of authority dismissals at a rate statistically different than all other racial and ethnic groups within RP schools, but that gap is decreasing. The figure displays predicted probabilities of defiance of authority dismissals between 2017-2020, using a difference-in-difference design that allows calculation of the rate of change both over time and between schools.

This snapshot of findings provides evidence that RP can contribute to SPPS Achieves goals of systemic equity and positive school and district culture. This is also relevant to the ongoing settlement agreement with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, as the findings related to dismissals may be a precursor to addressing racial disparities in suspensions, which have not yet materialized. Implementation science tells us that whole school change takes at least 3 years, and these findings are emerging in RP pilot sites that made substantial progress over 3.5 school years.

A common theme from SPPS RP leaders is that further progress towards these equity goals may not be achieved without ongoing funding and resources. An RP pilot site principal expressed that, *“As a larger system we need to reevaluate our commitment to the visions that we identify and I’m talking specifically about restorative practices... What it really needs to be is a coordinator. I’m not gonna lie. **We’re scratching and clawing.** I think we need to have a real honest conversation as a district on if we’re really committing to a vision. What does that mean? It has to mean more than: you’re part of a three year grant, then you’re on your own. **Because if we are really truly committing to it, then it means we’re dedicating resources to it: time, effort, money, people to continuing that, indefinitely.**”*