

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



Office of Charter Schools  
**NC ACCESS PROGRAM**  
NC Department of Public Instruction

## School Culture

## Social Emotional Learning

### Restoring Peace

#### Implementation Description

Maureen Joy Charter School (MJCS) in Durham, NC has been serving K-8 students since 1997. While the school currently dedicates 20 minutes of each day to Social Emotional Learning (SEL), school leaders saw additional needs which could be addressed through restorative practices. With the support of NC ACCESS funding, MJCS's leadership team received training at the [International Institute of Restorative Practices \(IIRP\)](#), established a partnership for professional development with [Peaceful Schools NC](#), and obtained coaching services from [Student U](#). With 71% of the students at MJCS identified as educationally disadvantaged (ED), the addition of restorative practices to their SEL tool box was a research based decision. "Research shows that the reliance on punitive school discipline like suspensions, expulsions, and school arrests—"school pushout"—deprives students of learning time and takes the greatest toll on nonwhite students, students with disabilities, LGBT youth and other vulnerable student groups" (Anderson, 2015). Students who are suspended are more at risk for poor attendance, inability to progress to the next grade, failure to graduate, and subsequent involvement in the juvenile and adult justice systems (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010).

Prior to the start of the 2021-22 school year, a small team consisting of the elementary and middle school principals along with other school leaders received training from IIRP in order to gain a thorough understanding of Restorative Justice's methodology and ultimate goals. This team was then poised to support teachers as they engaged in a full staff training with Peaceful Schools NC at the start of the school year. The half day training provided background about restorative practices and introduced common language related to restorative justice so staff could effectively communicate with one another. Student U provided consultant/coaching support for the senior leadership team. Since Student U is also located in Durham, the coaches were able to visit MJCS on a number of occasions to

#### About This School

##### Maureen Joy Charter School

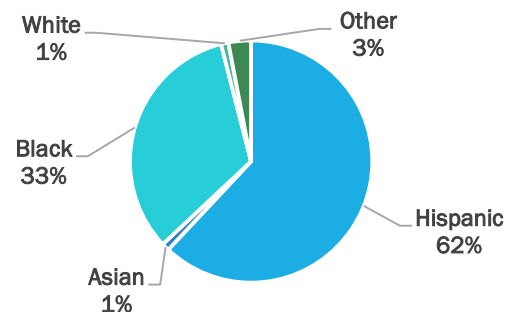
Students at Maureen Joy receive high-quality, personalized instruction in a safe and structured environment. Our commitment to social, emotional, mental, and physical health affirms our focus on the whole child. We have strong community partnerships and our focus on access (transportation, food service, translation/interpretation) strengthens the partnerships with our families.

**Year School Opened:** 1997-98

**Grant Awarded:** 2021-22

**Initial Grade Levels Served:** K-8

#### 2021-22 Student Demographics



**% ED Student Population:** 71%

**Urbanicity:** Urban / Durham, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Durham County)<sup>7</sup>:** 11.7%

observe the existing SEL program, talk with school counselors, and see the day-to-day routines of the school. Based on these observations, they provided detailed feedback to the school leadership team and generated a [summary report](#) with suggestions that the school is using to establish next year's priorities.

In order to prioritize restorative practices implementation, the school hired a full time Restorative Practices Coordinator (RPC) scheduled to begin on July 1, 2022. Having a RPC will ensure that dedicated time is given to supporting staff and school leaders as they adopt and implement new practices into their daily instruction. Also the RPC will provide educational opportunities for families, thus expanding the impact beyond the traditional school day.

Research shows that restorative practices can also dramatically improve school climate (McClure, 2016). Therefore, a team of MJCS teachers are collaboratively developing a plan to clarify the school culture. They intend to support teachers as they build community expectations in their classroom and provide tools to address situations when expectations are not being met. Their work will help the school create a culture that aligns with the school's mission and is beneficial for students, staff, and families.

## Results

Data for the 2021-22 school year shows a 75% decrease in in-school suspensions and over a 50% decrease in out of school suspensions compared to pre-COVID. This was a challenging year for students who struggled with mental health issues, interpersonal relationships and general anxiety. Rather than using traditional punitive discipline, the school helped students reflect on their behaviors by focusing on the person, rather than merely the behavior.

## Challenges

When implementing something new there is always tension between giving teachers autonomy and providing the structure they need. Teachers who value flexibility appreciate the new approach and those who appreciate structure were initially less comfortable. The realization that many teachers were already using some aspects of Restorative Practice increased teacher buy-in and helped them gain traction with early implementation.

Administrative and leadership bandwidth to focus on the implementation of something new was a significant challenge that led to the hiring of a Restorative Practices Coordinator.

## Future Modifications

Teachers will receive additional professional development from Peaceful Schools NC and Student U next year. The training will focus on tools, strategies and effective language associated with the practices. The overall model will be modified as needed based on teacher and Student U coaches feedback.

A dedicated RPC will be the biggest change for next year.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

Early training for key leaders provided momentum which was essential to a successful program launch. Following this training, it is important to train all staff so they too understand the rationale for implementing these practices.

Having an outside coach, in this case from Student U, visit the campus and provide feedback to the leadership team was incredibly helpful.

### Ongoing Supports

Maintaining a RPC on staff will be important as the school moves forward with long-term implementation. Additionally, staff members will need continued training.

The use of data to inform future modifications and measure impacts is necessary to ensure the program is implemented with fidelity and to inform any necessary changes.

## Equity Connections

Research shows that black students are suspended from school three times more often than their white peers, even for the same or lesser offense (Payne & Welch, 2010). Even more concerning is the long-term impact these suspensions have on minority students as punitive sanctions highly correlate with high drop-out rates and incarceration, known as the “school to prison pipeline” (Camera, 2021). Restorative Justice provides hope as it “appears to make a dent in those figures. In Denver, the discipline gap between black and white students narrowed by four percentage points” (Rowe, 2015) when consistently implementing Restorative Justice practices. With time and consistent implementation, Restorative Justice practices can mitigate discipline concerns, while also increasing equity and accessibility for minority students.

## Research

1. Anderson, M. (September 14, 2015) “*Will School-Discipline Reform Actually Change Anything?*”. The Atlantic. Accessed June 27, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/will-school-discipline-reform-actually-change-anything/405157/>
2. Camera, L. (July 27, 2021) “*Study Confirms Schools To Prison Pipeline*”. USA News & World Report. Accessed August 6, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2021-07-27/study-confirms-school-to-prison-pipeline#:~:text=July%2027%2C%202021%2C%20at%207%3A57%20a.m.&text=Children%20who%20attend%20schools%20with,school%2Dto%2Dprison%20pipeline.>
3. McClure, L. (October 10, 2016). “*Bringing Restorative Practices to Your School*”. Edutopia. Accessed on June 1, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/bringing-restorative-practices-to-your-school-laura-mcclure>
4. Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). “*How can we improve school discipline?*”. Educational Researcher, 39(1), 48–58.
5. Payne, A., & Welch, K. (2018). “*The effects of school conditions on the use of restorative justice in schools*”. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 16(2), 224–40.
6. Rowe, C. (January 25, 2015) “*In School Discipline, Intervention May Work Better Than Punishment*” The Seattle Times. Accessed August 6, 2022. Retrieved from [https://special.seattletimes.com/o/html/education/2025538481\\_edlabrestorativejusticexml.html](https://special.seattletimes.com/o/html/education/2025538481_edlabrestorativejusticexml.html)

7. United States Census Bureau. "*Quick Facts North Carolina*". Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>