

**A Collaborative Approach to School Safety: Merging Student Voice with School  
Personnel's Use of Restorative Practices for Effective Prevention**

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### **Abstract**

We describe a holistic approach to promoting school safety that merges an emphasis on student voice with staff training in restorative practices. We first describe current approaches to keeping schools safe based on the existing research literature. Given that most of these approaches rely on access to credible information about potential threats to school safety, we then discuss student voices as one critical source of information especially at the middle and high school level. We report on a recently developed tool designed to encourage students to share threats to school safety they are aware of with adults. Initial testing identified potential barriers and facilitators to students' willingness to share information. We discuss teacher training in restorative practices as one approach that might address some of these barriers, including anti-snitching cultures in schools, students' lack of trust in adult responses to student-identified concerns, and punitive school climates. Based on recent work, we identify barriers and facilitators to implementing restorative practices in schools. We provide recommendations about potential strategies to merge student voice with school personnel's training in restorative practices to minimize peer victimization that can escalate into violent behavior.

## **A Collaborative Approach to School Safety: Merging Student Voice with School Personnel's Use of Restorative Practices for Effective Prevention**

It should go without saying that all students are entitled to feel and be safe at school. A sense of safety is necessary for academic success as well as social-emotional well-being (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). All-too-frequent reports of violent behavior occurring on school grounds, however, suggest that we need to do more to ensure that schools are safe places for all students and to prevent school shooting tragedies. Given the documented increases in violent behavior at schools within the last five years (Irwin et al., 2022), especially as students and school personnel return to school buildings after the school closures related to the Covid-19 pandemic in the 2020-21 and 2021-2022 school years (Katsiyannis et al., 2022; Sawchuck, 2021), there seems to be a renewed urgency to re-think approaches to school safety. We first provide an overview of the current approaches to school safety given current knowledge of predictors of violent behavior, and how students, school personnel and parents perceive current approaches. We then propose a collaborative approach to school safety that focuses on student voice and staff training in restorative practices and present initial findings from our recent studies. Based on what we learned about potential facilitators and barriers to student voice and staff use of restorative practices, we propose potential next steps to keep schools safe. Finally, we present implications for research and practice.

Research suggests that students who engage in violent behavior often feel victimized by their peers, many for extended periods of time (León-Moreno et al., 2019). Adolescent students reported they had little recourse other than fighting back (Cava et al., 2021). Acts of violence, often intended as revenge against individuals or entire school communities perceived as unsupportive, tend to be planned over extended periods of time (Langman, 2017; Vossekuil et

al., 2004). Students planning violent, revenge-driven acts, tend to share their plans with other students they trust (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019; Vossekui et al., 2004). However, students privy to those plans often do not share their knowledge with school staff or adults who might be able to intervene and avert a tragedy (Langman, 2017; National Threat Assessment Center, 2019; Newman et al., 2004). The reasons for students' reluctance to share safety threats with adults include fear of punitive consequences administered by adults, lack of confidence in adult responses to student concerns, and retaliation from peers for breaking the code of silence ingrained in peer culture (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019; Brank et al., 2007; Stone & Isaacs, 2002; Syvertson et al., 2009).

Within this context our research agenda focuses on (a) empowering adolescent students (middle and high school level) to advocate for their own and others' physical and emotional safety, while at the same time (b) training teachers to promote non-punitive and restorative school environments that promote trust and positive relationships between teachers and students and among peers. Our work is rooted in students', school personnel's, and parents' perceptions of school safety and tries to align existing school safety practices with documented stakeholders' needs and preferences.

### **Current Approaches to Keeping Schools Safe**

School safety is more than the absence of violence. Keeping schools safe involves limiting and preventing peer-on-peer harm (e.g., bullying, harassment, relational aggression, social isolation; Hong & Espelage, 2012), teacher-on-student harm (e.g., implicit bias; DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022), corporal punishment (Bogacki et al., 2005; Heekes et al., 2022), institutional inaction (e.g., lack of supervision; Schneider et al., 2000), and inadequate mental health support (Lai et al., 2016). Equally important, school safety involves norming and

amplifying awareness of prosocial behaviors and promoting students' and staff's social and emotional well-being (Astor & Benbenishty, 2018; Lester et al., 2017; Volungis & Goodman, 2017).

Approaches to keeping students and teachers safe at school vary based on the state of current events. In the wake of school shootings widely reported and perhaps sensationalized in the media, policy makers and administrators tend to recommend “hardening” schools to prevent future tragedies. Kim and colleagues (2021) provided a multi-dimensional definition of school hardening and differentiate between physical, procedural, and psychological hardening.

Physical school hardening is commonly associated with locked doors to limit access to school grounds and buildings, increased supervision through security cameras, installation of metal detectors to monitor potential contraband being brought onto school grounds, and having law enforcement officers patrol the building (Warnick & Kapa, 2019). More recently, arming teachers is being considered to further physically harden schools, with mixed support from stakeholders and policy makers (Baranauskas, 2021). Irwin et al. (2022) reported that from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2019-2020 school year, a growing percentage of schools physically hardened their campuses. This trend coincided with a growing number of violent incidents on school grounds (see Center for Homeland Defense and Security, n. d. ). While physically hardened schools can offer an increased sense of safety and visible evidence of school personnel's safety measures, they can also promote perceptions of schools as dangerous places, where everyone is a potential threat to everyone else (Johnson et al., 2018; Mowen & Freng, 2019).

Procedural hardening involves active shooter drills, locker checks, and sign-in/sign-out procedures. While active shooter drills are often perceived as effective by school personnel

(Craig, 2022; Dagenhard, 2017), students perceive them as increasing fear and perceptions of risk and associate them with decreased school safety (Huskey & Connell, 2021).

Psychological hardening refers to proactively identifying and providing psychological support to potential offenders, such as mental health referrals, improving peer relationships, promoting positive and trusting school cultures, clear and consistently applied rules, reporting systems, and threat assessments. The need for mental health services in schools has been widely demonstrated (Lai et al., 2016; Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). The benefits of positive peer and student-teacher relationships are far-reaching and include students' sense of safety at school (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Volungis & Goodman, 2017). More and more states are implementing statewide tiplines that allow students to report concerning behavior or potential threats (Planty et al., 2022). Research suggests that while tiplines provide access to important data, follow-up responses and communication across stakeholders need to be further examined to assess their effectiveness (Stein-Seroussi et al., 2021). Threat assessments are a promising practice to differentiate between non-serious or less serious and more serious incidents (Cornell et al., 2018), and, if systematically implemented, can provide the necessary follow-up to address student support needs and avert harm (Cornell, 2021).

Kim and colleagues (2021) reported that physical hardening appears to be a prevalent approach to promoting school safety. Flannery et al. (2021) cautioned against potential deleterious effects of physical school hardening and recommend a more balanced approach that integrates relationship building and improving overall school climate. The challenge is to find a balanced approach that promotes school safety without stoking fear or alienating students or teachers, and that forges connections, encourages exchange of information, and defuses conflict. To try and identify what such a balanced approach might look like, our work is guided by the

voices of students, school personnel, and parents, and their perceptions of current school safety practices.

### **Student, School Personnel, and Parent Perceptions of School Safety**

A number of studies have examined student, school staff, and parental perceptions of school safety. Students associated safe schools with low incidence of bullying and victimization, positive relationships with teachers and peers, consistently applied rules, clean and orderly buildings, and a feeling of belonging to the school community (Mitchell et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Students associated the use of security cameras inside schools with a lower sense of safety and the presence of resource officers with a higher sense of safety (Johnson et al., 2018). Recent proposals to arm teachers have been met with skepticism by high school students who felt that armed teachers would contribute to a decrease in school safety (Shamserad et al., 2021). Based on nationally collected survey data, Irwin et al. (2022) reported that the percentage of students afraid of being attacked or harmed was 4.8% in 2019, and the percentage of students avoiding one or more places at school due to fear of attack was 5% in 2019. Both percentages represented increases compared to data collected in 2009. Finally, race and sexual orientation impact student perceptions of school safety. For example, awareness of disciplinary disparity and armed teachers were associated with Black students' low perceptions of school safety (Baranauskas, 2021; Pena-Shaff et al., 2019), and sexual and gender minority students tended to rate their school environments as less safe compared to their gender-conforming peers (Day et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020).

School personnel are not immune from threats to their safety and can be victimized by students as well as colleagues and parents. Espelage and colleagues (2013) documented the extent to which teachers experience violent behavior from students and associated violence

against teachers with overall negative school climates, lack of administrator support, and overcrowding. Conversely, teachers associated less violence in schools with well-organized support systems, consistent rules, and positive relationships. Irwin et al. (2022) reported that in the 2015-16 school year, 9.8% of teachers reported they were threatened with injury and 5.7% reported they were physically attacked. In a recent survey of educators conducted by *Education Week* after the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, 40% of respondents reported that they felt less safe than five years ago, while 38% felt their sense of their school's safety had not changed. Some educators felt that tensions derived from increasing political polarization destabilized their school's safety and created new challenges (Gewertz, 2022).

Based on periodically conducted Gallup Polls, parents' perceptions of their child's physical safety at school fluctuated based on reports of school shootings. In August 2019, approximately one year after the Parkland, Florida, school shooting, 34% percent of parents reported they feared for their child's safety at school (Brenan, 2019). Parents associated visible safety measures, such as metal detectors, cameras, and police officers with low perceptions of school safety (Mowen & Freng, 2019). Conversely, high levels of parent engagement and volunteering at school was indicative of fewer incidents of violent behavior and enhanced school safety (Hamlin & Li, 2020).

### **A Collaborative Approach to School Safety**

In response to the need for a balanced approach to school safety, our work focuses on developing and testing a holistic approach that engages adolescent students and their teachers in preventing harm, responding to conflict before it escalates into violence, and promoting prosocial behaviors and positive and trusting relationships. Given that research suggests that students tend to be more aware of safety threats than school adults (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019),



student voice is central to our work.

### **Student Voice**

Students are more likely to share information with adults they trust, in a context that encourages them to take ownership of their school's safety, and via a medium they find easy to access and use (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019; Syverston et al., 2009). These premises drove our efforts to develop and test a reporting tool for high school students as well as curricular and informational materials that would support its use and be easy to implement. The tool was intended as an alternative to statewide tiplines whose adoption, implementation, and effectiveness are still emerging (Planty et al., 2022; Stein-Seroussi et al., 2021).

The reporting tool, called *Advocatr*, was accessible via mobile app or internet. It had three primary functions: (a) reporting a safety concern ("Something Wrong"), (b) reporting a positive behavior ("Something Right"), and (c) reviewing the status of submitted reports. We conducted focus groups with students, school personnel, and parents to get guidance on what, when, how, and to whom students would report information with such a tool (Espelage et al., 2021; 2022). The option to report positive behavior was developed in direct response to students' request not to focus exclusively on negative events, consistent with the norming of positive behavior as one strategy to improve school climate (Connell, 2017). For Something Wrong and Something Right reports, students followed prompts about the nature of the event and how it impacted them emotionally. Reviewing the status of a report they made allowed students to see whether adults had simply received their report, whether they were reviewing it, or whether they had closed it out.

In contrast to existing state-wide tiplines, *Advocatr* was managed by local school personnel rather than the state police or another state agency. It required students to have a user

account, meaning that school personnel could follow up with reporting students to problem-solve and provide support as necessary, as well as acknowledge positive events. Students could access brief videos through the app to learn about the app's functions and what happened to the data submitted through the app, as well as the meaning of advocacy and restorative responses to conflict (e.g., understanding how one's behavior impacts others, active listening, participating in circles, being accountable, and making things right). Finally, students could access brief one-page "Did-You-Know" documents, which provided information on physical vs. emotional safety, snitching vs. reporting, confidentiality, how the app functioned, and restorative responses to conflict (Vincent et al., 2022a).

To promote students' use of *Advocatr*, the app was accompanied by a 9-week curriculum that encouraged students to reflect on (a) how to promote and proactively build positive relationships through advocating for others, and (b) how to repair harm and resolve conflict in a restorative manner. Instructional activities included review of the videos available to students via the app. To facilitate teacher implementation of the curriculum, the lesson plans consisted of "plug-and-play" powerpoints interspersed with student reflection or discussion activities.

To further promote student ownership of their school climate, the instructional activities invited students to create a school-wide campaign focused on student advocacy and school safety. Students were introduced to the steps for planning, preparing, implementing, and evaluating such a school-wide campaign.

### ***Initial Findings***

To date, the Student Ownership, Accountability, and Responsibility for School Safety (SOARS) intervention has been field tested with a small number of teacher and student participants (Vincent et al., 2022), and pilot tested with a total of four high schools (Vincent et

al., 2022b). Overall outcomes appear promising, indicating that students availed themselves of *Advocatr* at a slightly higher rate than newly established statewide tiplines, and that students from some racial/ethnic minority groups tended to use the app at disproportionately high rates to report concerns. Overall, however, *Advocatr* usage was lower than anticipated based on initial student feedback (Espelage et al., 2022). The intervention was associated with improvements in students' perceptions of personal safety, school connectedness and peer victimization, and willingness to take ownership of their school's safety (Vincent et al., 2022b).

### ***Facilitators of Student Voice***

Based on our initial studies, we hypothesized factors that might have facilitated students' use of the app to share information with school adults. Students might have preferred *Advocatr* over statewide tiplines because *Advocatr* was locally managed. Statewide tiplines are commonly monitored by the state police, and students might be reluctant to provide information to authorities they might not trust (Espelage et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2022a). Students, especially students from minority backgrounds, may consider school personnel—although also in a position of authority—as more trustworthy than law enforcement.

Implementation of *Advocatr* and local monitoring of student-generated reports was supported by project funds during the tests we conducted. The moderate use of *Advocatr* assuaged school personnel's initial concerns that they might be inundated by student reports and would not have the capacity to respond. Sustained implementation of a data system capturing student reports might therefore be associated with manageable workloads for staff, which might facilitate schools' adoption of similar locally managed reporting tools.

There was the possibility that students might weaponize the app to bully or harass each other with false reports. However, no false reports were made during our studies. It is likely that

students' awareness that any report could be linked to the reporting student via the user account kept them from misusing the app. Confidential, instead of anonymous, reporting could therefore encourage accountability for what information is shared.

### ***Barriers to Students Making Their Voices Heard***

Initial testing of the *Advocatr* allowed us to hypothesize barriers to students' use of reporting tools that warrant further study. Most importantly, anti-snitching sentiment and distrust of school adults were stronger than expected (Espelage et al., 2022). Adolescent students are wary of sharing information with school adults because they distrust adults' responses to it and fear social retaliation from peers. This wariness is deeply ingrained in adolescent peer cultures and is a challenge to overcome (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019). Because of their distrust in adult responses, students often find it easier to respond to victimization with physical aggression on their own rather than relying on adult help (Aceves et al., 2010).

Students' might also have been reluctant to use *Advocatr* because they found the app unengaging. Many adolescents use social media apps to satisfy their need for social attention (Agger, 2015) and expect instant gratification through responses (e.g., 'Likes') their posts generate (Burrow & Rainone, 2017; Mohr & Mohr, 2017). These instant responses keep app users engaged. *Advocatr* generated automated "thank you" messages when students tabbed submit after generating a report; however, these automated responses clearly did not provide the type of social reinforcement necessary to keep adolescents engaged. It might be necessary to gamify school safety reporting tools so that students keep engaging with the tool. A tool like *Advocatr*, which allowed students to notice and report prosocial behaviors to promote a positive school culture, might lend itself to engaging students in games to reward positive reporting and increase students' ability to notice and willingness to report prosocial behaviors improving their

school culture.

Anecdotal feedback from school staff participating in our studies indicated that students also experienced app overload. Many schools have school or department-specific apps that students are expected to use to access homework assignments or educational information. In addition, students regularly access social media apps to maintain contact with their peer groups and friends (Anderson & Jiang, 2015). Thus, *Advocatr* entered a crowded field of apps and it was challenging to keep students' attention focused on its goals and functions.

During our formative research with stakeholders, we learned from parents and school staff that adolescent students tend to have a high tolerance level for behaviors that many adults might perceive as unacceptable (Espelage et al., 2022). Students might willingly ignore behaviors, such as sexual advances or verbal threats that might be indicative of risks to one's safety or that could escalate into physically threatening actions, due to perceived group norms (Rimal & Real, 2005). Increasing student awareness of concerning behaviors and their associated future risks might require considerable curricular intervention. In addition, pandemic-related changes in school policies affecting perceived norms might also impact students' willingness or reluctance to report behaviors they see as incongruous with their group norms as students return to in-person instruction (Katsiyannis et al., 2022).

Finally, fundamental to student use of *Advocatr* was a sense of accountability to one's community. Adolescent ego-centrism and associated risk-taking behavior (Lin, 2016) can be challenging in promoting accountability to self and others. To develop a sense of accountability for their school community, students would first need to perceive their school environment as a community supportive of them and their needs, and their school culture as sufficiently trustworthy to share information.

Many of the barriers associated with student voice as a primary component of a school safety framework suggested that school adults might need to do more to promote trusting relationships, provide responses to student posts that keep students engaged, increase student awareness of problematic behaviors, and encourage accountability to a school community that students perceive as supportive and trustworthy. Restorative practices generally promote dialogue between students and adults to promote trust and positive relationships, prevent hurtful behavior from escalating, and restoring relationships once they have been damaged (Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). As we learned about the barriers to students' use of *Advocatr*, we looked towards developing and testing restorative practices training for high school teachers to address some of the identified barriers and promote school environments where adolescent students might be more willing to share information about potential safety concerns.

### **Teacher Training in Restorative Practices**

Schools' interest in implementing restorative practices is substantial (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This interest is often motivated by a desire to prevent exclusion of students from the classroom or school, facilitate reintegration back into school communities after disciplinary exclusions, and promote equitable student outcomes through community and relationship building and rebuilding (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Vincent, McClure et al., 2021). We conceptualized restorative practices along a multi-tiered support continuum to facilitate adoption by schools familiar with the logic of multi-tiered support systems (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

Our training consisted of five modules. Module 1 presented the rationale for blending restorative practices with existing multi-tiered discipline approaches and introduced school personnel to cognitive mechanisms that can result in biased decision-making. Implicit bias has

been identified as a contributor to students' distrust of school personnel (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022). Module 2 focused on Tier 1 or universal skills to proactively promote positive student-teacher and peer relationships fundamental to supportive classroom communities where all students feel comfortable making their voice heard. Participants had the opportunity to practice active listening, learned about the elements and use of affective language, saw examples of reframing negative or hostile language, and were introduced to holding community-building circles with their students. Because successful restorative practices implementation at the universal support tier depends on strong student buy-in, Module 3 offered strategies to promote student engagement in community building circles. Given that parents might not be familiar with or wary of restorative practices implemented to provide universal support to all students, Module 4 allowed participants to practice responding to questions parents might have, formulating in their own words what restorative practices implementation looks like in their classrooms, and how it might benefit students. Module 5 focused on Tier 2 and 3 restorative approaches to respond to events without excluding students from the classroom or school and providing elevated support. These approaches included preparing for and conducting restorative conferences or circles to address harm that occurred. Throughout the school year, we provided coaching to training participants to assist with implementing the learned skills in their classrooms and problem-solving unforeseen challenges. More detail on the training materials' development and their delivery is available in Vincent, English, and colleagues (2021).

### ***Initial Findings***

We conducted a feasibility test with a small number of schools. The training appeared associated with school personnel's self-reported increases in using restorative practices and willingness to try new relationship-building activities with their students. Student perceptions of

their school climate proved challenging to change (Vincent, English, et al., 2021). After the feasibility test, we revised the training modules based on the test outcomes and then conducted a larger pilot test. Results from the larger pilot test of the training modules are still being analyzed. Initial results suggest small gains in adoption and implementation of restorative practices.

### ***Facilitators of Teacher Use of Restorative Practices***

Initial findings revealed some facilitators of teachers' adoption and use of restorative practices in their classrooms. Consistent with previous literature (Astor & Benbenishty, 2018; Gregory et al., 2021; Lodi et al., 2021; Pavelka, 2013), participants shared with us anecdotally during debrief meetings at the end of the school year the importance of promoting a restorative environment among staff so that school personnel feel comfortable speaking out and seeking support before they invite students to do the same. Thus, strong administrative commitment to creating a restorative school environment emerged as an important facilitator of changing teacher practices in the classroom.

The training's emphasis on listening to students' voices and providing opportunities for students to speak out appeared to make intuitive sense to most school personnel (Vincent, McClure et al., 2021), and participating teachers strived to establish predictable routines for students to make their voices heard. Teachers found the newly learned skills particularly helpful during the pandemic-related school closures when they needed to keep students connected to school through carefully maintaining relationships in virtual environments. The need to build and re-build relationships is likely to become more urgent as students and teachers return to in-person instruction (Velez, 2021).

### ***Barriers to Teachers' Use of Restorative Practices***

While teacher training in restorative practices appeared associated with increased teacher



willingness and ability to create space for students to make their voice heard and promote trusting relationships, a number of barriers to restorative practices implementation emerged anecdotally during debrief meetings at the end of the school year. Most importantly, relationship building takes time. Implementing community-building circles takes time away from instruction, which can be challenging for teachers whose first responsibility is often considered to prepare students to meet academic benchmarks. Especially in high schools, where teachers need to prepare students to graduate on time, allocating time for relationship building activities can easily be considered secondary.

Teachers are typically trained and encouraged to actively manage their classrooms (Wolff et al., 2021). A manager is expected to be in a position of authority and direct others' behavior. In contrast, a restorative environment is built around shared decision-making and shared authority (Brown, 2017). Decentralizing authority in the classroom can be challenging for teachers who are reluctant to relinquish control and their position of power. Teachers who might feel threatened by students (Espelage et al., 2013; Irvin et al, 2022) are less likely to share power with students in the classroom. Mutual distrust can make relationship building difficult.

Students are more likely to make their voice heard if they can comfortably speak their truth. Students are sensitive to what is being heard and what is being silenced, and often simply say what they believe others want to hear (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019). Students' authentic voices might be critical of their classroom environments or school staff. Substantive training, coaching, and self-reflection might be necessary for teachers to confidently respond to authentic student voices without alienating them.

In an effort to manage student behavior, many schools have systems in place to reinforce desirable student behavior with privileges or tangible reinforcers (Zajda, 2021). Students who are

accustomed to being extrinsically motivated might find it difficult to engage in behaviors, such as speaking out about potential threats, that seem to be primarily intrinsically motivated.

Promoting environments where students are motivated to be accountable for their school community might be important for teachers to solicit information from students.

Finally, teacher turn-over disrupts trusting relationships fundamental for students to make their voice heard (Volungis & Goodman, 2017). The problem of disrupted trust is coming into sharp focus as students return to in-person instruction and many teachers leave the profession in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Velez, 2021). In this stressed and fragile learning environment, school personnel might find themselves needing to carefully rebuild relationships and regain student trust.

### **Recommendations for Next Steps**

Given the facilitators of and barriers to student use of a school safety reporting tool and to teacher efforts to promote classrooms where students feel comfortable sharing their safety concerns, we are currently exploring simultaneously training teachers in restorative practices and making a reporting tool available to students. The overall goal of this two-pronged approach is to promote strong relationships between teachers and students while they together learn about the concepts on which those relationships are built, such as mutual trust, power-sharing, and accountability. To this end, we have modified the student curriculum preparing students to use the reporting tool, modified the teacher training to align it with the student curriculum, and proposed a staggered roll-out of the intervention components during the school year.

Because trust between teachers and students emerged as fundamental for students to make their voice heard and for teachers to hear what students have to say, the revised curriculum gradually introduces students to verbalizing how they feel about their school's culture, listening

to and communicating with peers and adults, reflecting on and experiencing what trust means and how one gains and loses trust, how intent and impact of one's behavior can differ, what it means to be accountable and take ownership, how someone's power can manifest itself, and how one can engage with conflict to work towards resolution. Lessons engage students as well as teachers in partner and group activities, games, role-play, and reflection.

Instead of a primarily didactic approach to training teachers in restorative practices, the revised teacher training engages teachers with the same lessons they will present to students. This approach focuses teacher attention on the core principles underlying relationship building, encourages them to examine those concepts from their own perspective as well as from the perspective of students, and allows them to become familiar with the curricular content and confident with conducting the lesson activities, such as mapping support networks, holding community building circles, writing reflective journal entries, participating in games, and discussing videos about communication and behavioral intent and impact.

In our previous study, we made the *Advocatr* app available to students at the beginning of the year before they had completed the accompanying curriculum (Vincent et al. 2022b). This might have contributed to students losing sight of the app or insufficiently connecting the app to the curriculum's content. We are now proposing a staggered roll-out of the intervention components to allow for "runways" for students to gain confidence with the concepts underlying the use of the reporting app and a "runway" for teachers to gain confidence with teaching the student curriculum and familiarity with the core concepts of relationship building and rebuilding. Teachers will first participate in the training. As they gain familiarity with restorative practices and confidence with teaching the student curriculum, they will start engaging students with the lessons. As students gain confidence with the concepts taught in the student curriculum,

they will gain access to the app to practice the concepts they learned about. This staggered roll-out is intended to gradually build mutual trust and understanding necessary for students to make their voice heard and for teachers to hear what students have to say and to respond to it in a supportive manner.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

School safety remains a serious challenge for U.S. educators and communities. While evidence points towards students as an important source of information about potentially concerning behaviors that might escalate to violent action, existing research suggests a vicious cycle of distrust and fear operating among students that is difficult to disrupt. Students are reluctant to share safety threats because of their distrust of adults, fear of peer retaliation and victimization, and punitive school environments, which—in turn—appear to be amplified by adults’ reluctance to share power in the classroom, allocate time to building, strengthening, and rebuilding relationships, and perhaps adults’ fear that they themselves might become victims of violence perpetrated by students against them.

Interrupting mutual distrust and fear cycles might require simultaneously intervening with students and teachers and promoting honest dialogue in safe environments. Starting positive community and relationship building at the pre-K or elementary level could ultimately build student trust in adults. Integrating restorative practices into teacher pre-service programs might build teacher confidence in relationship building and rebuilding to promote student trust. These efforts seem to be gaining ground (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). At the same time, making tools available to students to share information seems equally important. Statewide tiplines (Planty et al., 2022) and locally managed school apps might also provide a means for students to share information.

School safety experts and commentators have reacted to the recent increased spate of school shootings by calling for consideration of the following strategies: (a) secure the school using school security technology (i.e., building design, operations, cameras), (b) hire school resource officers who are well trained for their roles and are not afraid to confront a teenager with an assault weapon, (c) provide adequate mental health services to students who have a clear need for it, and (d) promote responsible gun ownership with families where 70% of guns used in school shootings originate (Flannery et al., 2021; King & Bracy, 2019; National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). These largely reactive strategies, if implemented in a multi-pronged and coordinated fashion, may well impact the occurrence of school shootings. However, we are persuaded that the long-term prevention of such tragedies could be achieved if we incorporated student voices and restorative practices into the school's routine operations.

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