

# S4.E1 - Kentwood shares their early adoption views on Restorative Practices

Thu, Feb 22, 2024 12:06PM • 42:00

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

restorative practices, district, Veronica, restorative, parents, demographics, staff, teachers, implementing, talked, groups, circles, part, building, professional development, sunil, classroom, relationships, intentional, support

## Marvin

Hello and welcome everybody to *Getting to the Core* a Wayne RESA, Educational Service Agency broadcast. My name is Marvin Franklin. I'm one of the Education Improvement Consultants here at Wayne RESA. I have a team of four here with me today, Nekeya Irby and Vonetta Clark-Tooles. They're also Improvement Consultants. We call ourselves E.I.C.'s. And, we have Dr. Terrence Scott, one of our Climate and Culture Consultants. Currently, we are in the process of developing a three-part series beginning today regarding restorative practices. 'Restorative Practices' is an emerging social science that studies how to strengthen relationships between individuals as well as social connections within communities.

On today's episode, we have the pleasure and honor of collaborating with a few VIPs from Kentwood Public Schools, Veronica Lake is going to be the lead for us today. She is the Executive Director of Students Services. And this is the district right outside of Grand Rapids. I will also allow them some time to tell a little bit about their location and their demographics. But we brought them in for a great discussion regarding their district's strategic plan and how restorative practices is working to assist them with improving school culture and relationships. Well, hello, Veronica, how are you today?

## Veronica

I'm doing well, Marvin. How are you? I'm doing well. Thank you so much for joining us today. Who all do you have with you on the call today? We have a powerhouse team here this afternoon. We have Carrie Tellerico, who is a fellow cabinet member. She's the executive director of elementary education. We also have another fellow cabinet member here Sunil Joy, who is our Executive Director of Strategy and Innovation. And we have Mr. Andy Tevlin, who was a member of our team, who was the MTSS supervisor.

## Marvin

Hello Team! Tell me a little bit about your district, your demographics, your location, and how you even came to this (point) about restorative practices in the first place.

## Veronica

So, Sunil eats, breathes and dreams about our demographic data, so I won't leave him out. He's gonna string it all together perfectly for you.

## Sunil

Yeah, this is something we talk quite a bit about. It's a point of pride for our district. And I think it ties in well with the why behind restorative practices, but Kenwood Public Schools, we're located outside of Grand Rapids, just south of Grand Rapids, we have about 9500 students.

We're the second largest district in Kent County, really the second largest in West Michigan, we're one of three districts in the county in this area that's actually growing as well. And a lot of that growth is around our most diverse population. So Kenwood is actually the most diverse district in the state of Michigan, the fourth most diverse in the entire country. And if we were to break down what that actually means, in terms of demographics, we're about 27% white, 17% Hispanic, about a third Black or African American 14% Asian, we have about 100 different languages that are represented in Kenwood, and we've seen some tremendous growth across all of these different demographics. So, for example, just in the last 10 to 15 years, we've seen 160% increase in our English Learner population. Since the early 2000s. We've seen a 211% increase in Hispanic students and then 146% increase in Asian students and understanding who the demographics of our community are and understand the demographics of our district. It only made sense that a strategy such as restorative practices would work well in a district like ours and I'll let Miss Lake and others chime in on what that looks like.

## Marvin

Well, that was great. I'm interested to hear how this this conversation flows from there because we've got a lot of interesting dynamics that should really flow well for restorative practices. He took the words right out of my mouth; my team and I were really grateful to hear such beautiful demographics in terms of how the diversity of your district is. I actually had no idea about that. And it was really, really cool to hear that. I'd be curious to hear with that and with those demographics in mind, how can you just describe some

specific examples of how you're able to implement restorative practices across your district and some of the success stories you've had as a result of implementing that?

## Veronica

Okay. Yeah. So, I would say we have, like, we very carefully started to work it through. Because you know, when you say restorative practices immediately, sometimes people's mindset goes directly to discipline. Well, we wanted to make sure that we were looking at how we engage with each other building relationships among adults, but also how we build relationships with our students. And using some of those, you know, strategies that have been used for a variety, you know, across time, but just kind of all packaged together, under the umbrella of restorative practices. So, we started this path of trying to have looking at what it's like to be restorative, not to do restorative things. That's an ever-evolving process for all of us. Because that's, you know, the work starts with you, with each individual. So about three years ago, we started just with the light lifting, and being introduced to restorative practices, some professional development around that. And then we started to outline some particular strategies that we were going to focus on, and that we were going to learn to become.

Not experts at but you know, that it becomes just a part of our daily work and our daily lives. It's how we are, how we move and how we operate.

So, we've done a lot of professional development with different groups. And we identified a variety of practices that we wanted to do, particularly like with the circles, community building circles. We've done some around academics, you know, where you can have a conversation about what you're learning. And some of those we gave prompts, and then others we had people share with us what some of those prompts might be. Andy has been very involved in a lot of that work. Andy, you want to add anything to that?

## Andy

Yeah, thank you. One thing, I'm gonna give a shout out to Brooke Davis and Kendall Hills, she's a colleague of ours, that's just just north of where we're at. She gave us the idea of what we ended up calling MTSS boot camps, where you pull together your leadership teams from buildings, and would give like an intensive two-day PD with follow up and building capacity throughout your district.

The focus of the two boot camps has been restorative practices. Some lessons learned from boot camp were that we were able to purposely pull in a lot more players like our academic coaches, and people that had attentional connections with teachers in the building we went through so we really delivered a PD that we wanted them to tailor to

their buildings. And one of the things we did is we talked about, you know, what does Effective Language look like in the classroom? And how does this fit into our instructional strategies? And rather than it be something where this is siloed, and just Student Services, we used an interdisciplinary approach and said, this is really how we're delivering instruction. This is how we're connecting the students. And the success stories to someone that is we're partnered with Michigan State University's EPIC group, their research arm, and we saw some real positive data about our teachers giving feedback that they saw intentional connections to instruction, when we compared it to other districts that were part of that study about restorative practice a visitation. And that's, that's not something to brag on. I just think it's something of lessons learned as we're going through the process that really resonated with teachers. So how do we continue to spread that message that if we're drawing those explicit connections to instruction, we're going to get some more buy in with our teacher leaders, how to weave instruction or restorative practices in classroom.

### **Terrance**

I really, really appreciate you lifting that instructional piece in there. That's one thing so as a person who leads started practices trainings across different school districts across main County, that's one of the biggest things that I've found is that even Veronica mentioned earlier, she said, we don't do restorative, we are restorative. So, thinking about that as a mindset getting away from punitive action and leaning more toward a restorative mindset, the incorporation of RP does work seamlessly in concert with culturally relevant teaching, because it allows you to communicate expectations in a way that is restorative and ultimately healing. For kids that don't feel threatened, they get flooded, they can bring their full selves to the classroom. And they're not so much concerned about, you know, being respectful or being in compliance as they are with just being in sync with a teacher and ultimately getting the work done. So whether we're glad to hear that, thank you very much for sharing, I really, really appreciate it.

### **Marvin**

Carrie, were you about to share something too?

### **Carrie**

I was just about our implementation. I feel like one of the most powerful pieces was, as Andy shared, you know, there were professional developments that we delivered and, you know, buildings curtailed to their buildings to really fit but there were the core practices of restorative practices and helped us to implement district wide. And I think the most

powerful piece was that it was just not a one and done. It wasn't like in August, when we came back from school. It you know, we revisited again, at all of our professional development days throughout the school year, and then how could we also embed it during staff meetings. And you know, I think Veronica fits it perfectly. I was just telling my staff when I was a principal, we live restoratively, we just don't, you know, we just don't do it when we need it. And we need to be restorative with one another as adults. And so, I think once people started to internalize those components, that was really a big shift in our district, and then they figured out it wasn't going away. So, I think that's one of the biggest pieces is to when you continuously revisit professional development and making sure it's embedded in everything that you do.

## Marvin

So, one of the things that I like about what I'm hearing, it sounds like you're developing a positive culture, with the staff. And so, one of the challenges that we are seeing from time to time is teacher retention, teacher attendance. So, my question, before I get into anything even deeper than that is, have you seen a difference in the teacher attendance? Not just the data, but just the willingness to want to come to work, wanting to be a part of Kentwood Public Schools? Or is that about the same? Or is that something we haven't started to look into yet? And also, the student attendance; are our kids proud to be a part of this district? Because they want to be a part and a byproduct of that is coming to school more often.

## Veronica

I don't know, Sunil may want to chime in on this one. I don't think we have. I don't think we've been at this long enough to say that we have, without a doubt, you know, that it has made this much of a difference in terms of students being present with absenteeism, we that is actually an area of focus for us, we truly are struggling, and we know and, and safety, I think with everybody. So, we know, when you feel like you belong in a place and you know, that you can be connected to you have a champion.

## Sunil

We know that, you know, kids want to be there more, we know staff want to be present more? Well, what I can say we've noticed, though, in terms of the practices is that we often we'll have more staff who are having disagreements with each other who are asking for and are willing to participate in a restorative conference. We hold those restorative conferences with between staff members, between staff and students, between students, between parents and staff, between leaders. So we're getting better at using, like I said

about living restoratively like Carrie just said, and it requires us to be willing to do it as adults and model it as adults so that we can see those results transcend into our classrooms, we've seen more effective language happening, not as deeply as we would like to see it. But you know, I think you anytime you start out in an implementation that first year, I mean, you're pretty much thinking like, oh, there he goes. And we're and we're done. And it doesn't happen that way.

We have restorative circles, or we have community building circles. We do it even at our administrative offices. If you come here on any Tuesday morning at 815. You will see people throughout this administrative building, including the superintendent in a circle, community building. And as Carrie said, they happen at staff meetings. We do them when we're doing professional development and training, when we do our board retreats, our Board of Education participates in those as well. Parents, parent meetings, parent training, we're making them more. And so hopefully over time, as we use our student perception, surveys, I say it wrong every time. So, Sunil, you can correct me. As we you look at that data, like we do dissect it and try to see if we are seeing any difference in those areas. But again, I think it's just a little early for us to say we see it as being a huge success or not, we do think it's having an impact. I think it'll be a little bit more time before we can say just how deep of an impact that is making people stay. Nor that as we're making kids want to be in school. Yeah, just to add to that, as Veronica had mentioned, we are early in the process. But one of the things and Andy referred to this as well is we have a partnership with Michigan State University epic. And that's really around measuring the impact or the effectiveness of restorative practices. That's a that's a process that started about a year or two ago. And Amy has been pretty well involved in that as of i and it's a partnership with not only Kent wood, but a number of districts. In our region. Within Kent, I see that it is who are all restorative practices districts to really understand what is working well, what, what needs to improve and grow upon. And so it's providing actual data around some of these strategies. Because at the end of the day, restorative practices is about all those things you talked about. It's about creating a community, with staff, with families, with students, as well. So that's definitely the long term, hope and goal.

## Andy

Sorry, I want to piggyback on one thing, Veronica said, because I think we're seeing in our Michigan voices survey, we're seeing belonging numbers that are going trending in the right direction, but we're just in year two of implementation. So, you know, we want to be careful of drawing conclusions with that. But the willingness of staff members to come together and resolve conflicts, using restorative practices to me as some great qualitative data of others a culture shift. And there's even, there's even a recognition at times of some of the big teaching points that we have on restorative practices of there is a



conflict. And it's like, well, if we're going to resolve this using restorative practices, we must have a relationship to begin with. And that's coming from the people that are part of the conflict. And so, then we talk about, well, how do we build those trust, trust bridges back together. So, I think there's a lot of positives that come able to solve conflict, really appreciate the executive team supporting that. And I've been fortunate enough to be a part of a lot of those conversations and helping with that. And I appreciate our district really putting that at the center and saying we need to value relationships.

## Vonetta

Thank you so much, Andrew, that really kind of dovetails all that I was listening to, with your role as a MTSS manager. Many people don't understand that. The MTSS framework works with any intervention and with you all having chosen restorative practices as your intervention. And it sounds like you're going really hard, right to make sure that every level from a leadership level, which is what really MTSS requires down to the classroom, that you are utilizing the strategies of effective language to really get at the heart of being restorative and not doing restorative practices to Veronica's point. My question, and this is for any of you really is How are parents responding to the shifts and the changes that they're seeing in the district? And have you been intentional to include them? Or what are your next steps as it relates to involving parents in the processes?

## Veronica

You want to go Carrie?

## Carrie

I was just going to share a really cute story. So, I was formerly an elementary principal when we were implementing, and one of the fourth-grade parents reached out to me and she said, you know, what are these circles like, every night at dinner, we're doing circles, like, you'll start to hear those kinds of things. And that's just like really informal data, and just those really funny, cute, quirky stories that you hear all the time. And so, you know, I think, you know, when we get to the point where, you know, kids are starting to share that information, you know, with their friends and their families and those kinds of things.

It's like, like I said, it's informal data. We bet intentional sharing information at the building level. And just making sure you know, parents have an understanding of what restorative practices are. So it's just a little bit. So Veronica, I don't want to take take everything, so I'll let you go.

## Veronica

During our strategic planning, time, the the core committee was, was heavy with parents, and community partners. And so while we were doing some of these things, like already, it became very clear to us that the community wanted that and parents wanted that. And we didn't just start with those with that broader, you know, core group. But it was then the information that we pulled from there also went to smaller parent groups. And in those smaller parent groups, we would have the same conversations, what is important to you? What do you want to make sure your students are coming away with, you know, and so we talked about mental health and all those other things, we know that there's just that tight core connection between the sense of belonging, the so we have, so it's like a three-pronged approach, we, you know, it's our PBIS. It's our Capturing Kids Hearts, and it's restorative practices. So, our PBIS framework is designed so that we know how to operate as a school community. It's really important communities need rules, they need guidelines, they need these things. So that everybody knows how to be a part of it, you need to know what those expectations are Capturing Kids Hearts, core components from those are our social contracts. So different groups are for the purpose of different things. And we do different things in those different groups and their different attitudes and their different expectations. And so what are our agreements with each other. And then restorative practices represent that relationship building part. But some, not often, always. So, if you're in a relationship, or marriage, if you have children or grandchildren, you know what I mean, you have to have a way to have a disagreement and be able to talk it through and be able to get to the foundational piece. And so that's where those restorative practices piece, you have to heal in it so that you can move forward, we don't always have to be the best of friends. But we do have to find a way that we can respect each other's opinion and views and walk through that. So, our core parent groups were involved in that, again, we still have a lot of work to do to stretch that out across the district, you know, I think we will know that is working. And it's working well, when we walk into a space, and a parent or student is saying, hey, let's use this as our circle topic, or they're creating a circle. And we, you know, we don't have to initiate that like, to me, that's how I will know it has become a part of who we are, as a community, a broader community.

## Marvin

Please call me when that happens, because I would love to be a part of that I really have some great feelings about that. My, my question, I'm going to lead a little bit towards Andrew, but everybody, and we've kind of touched on a little bit, but I'm going to try to get a little dirty in the weeds in this in this question. Implementing district wide protocols for positive relationships, data driven decision making, threat assessment, and option-



based crisis response. Please tell us give us some examples of some of the challenges that were encountered. And then how were they addressed?

## Andy

I know Veronica, and Carrie, have some notes on this, because we talked about it before. But I think one of the things that even relates back to the last question is, you know, looking at your fidelity measures, and we talked about fidelity is. Are we doing what we said we would do as adults? So what we committed to doing as adults to support children, are we doing that? So we were a lot of us are familiar with the TSI for PBIS or MTS s.

But there's also developed by the same University of Oregon, a tiered fidelity inventory for restorative practices. And so at a tier one level, we take both the one for MTSS and restorative practices. And what we've tried to get through to leadership teams is this is not a way to score yourself. And then the district looks at it and says like, Oh, that's great. Like, or why aren't you doing this? This is truly a self assessment to do problem solving off of and so I think the parent piece is a perfect example of that right?

I'll give a shout out to our SEL coaches at the elementary level that put together some parent newsletters and do a great job and communicate with parents. But when we do that part of the restorative practices assessment on the TSI, and look at all the components to score yourself a two, there's room for improvement. And so leading those conversations and then directing leadership teams to go back and say, How can we better connect with parents and make sure that they know what's going on with that piece of it? So that's, that's going to be part of my answer is those fidelity measures and truly using them, and we have times of the year that we come together and say, let's look at our TSI, and then come up with action items and strategies of how we're going to support that.

## Carrie

So I'm gonna give my two cents, I'm gonna give both hats, my old principal role and my newer role here, you know, change is hard when you start holding people accountable for their actions and what you're implementing. You know, there is that pushback, because it does feel unfamiliar. And so I think it's about navigating that also and helping and supporting people in where they're at. So thank you, Andy, he embraces me where I'm at, though, is appreciate that from him. And you know, I also think it's about making sure that principals at the building level have what they need to be successful. So if they're not understanding a component of maybe what it looks like in our student data system, is that the ground support that is offered and you know, Andy does an amazing job at that, and just like being on site, and being very patient with people as they continue to walk through the those items, I think that's a huge component of our success. And I think, you know, of

course, would have been growing pains, I think that's true in any, you know, initiative and change, change that's happening. I agree, epic, the alignment piece is huge. So we've done a lot of professional development, around just our core practices, like we, you know, we started out our initial focus was on proactive circles, and effective language.

## Veronica

So we can master those critical parts. And we wanted to make sure that we were we were training around the continuum. But we didn't want to come quickly go to the more reactive end of the continuum, and we wanted to be as proactive as we could. So our professional development, we've had a series of professional development opportunities, where we train different groups of people, different role groups, and an effort to have a common language across the board. So that you know it when we say we're doing more proactive circles, if you were to speak to a behavior specialist, that should look like and sound like the same thing that we say, when we're talking to a classroom teacher, we've even had professional development with our office staff, because they started to say, you know, I hear things about this whole restorative practices stuff. And, you know, kids are often down here, what should we be doing. And so we've done professional development with them, our after school program staff, the 21st century learning group, you know, they're doing their learning the same thing again, while we might move, you know, further on the continuum, depending on the role that people are in our common practice in our common professional and development has been around those core things. And we are trainer from initial training that we use for trainer of trainers. And what I forgot to say is we trained about 17 to 18. train trainers district wide in various roles on purpose. And we used at RP, International Institute for restorative practices. And we have a really good relationship with with our trainer who has just, you know, almost anything we can come up with, he'll go, Oh, here's a protocol you might want to think about. So we've established some baseline things that we're working towards. And each year as we get a little bit better with practice, we, you know, try to get it to be a little bit more strategic. Again, it's early, but we feel really good about a lot that we're doing.

## Nekeya

It sounds like there's been so much intentionality behind the implementation of restorative practices in your district. And that is so encouraging. I am curious to know beyond the professional learning that teachers and administrators are receiving, what does the support look like for them on a day to day basis when they're struggling to implement in their classroom settings or in their school buildings? Could you talk more about that?

## Veronica

Well, Andy, that's okay.

## Andy

I think, you know, Veronica hit on it with our, one of the one of the people that we're partnering with Rodney, our trainer, we were intentional in bringing certain groups so that I could support teachers. And so we brought our academic coaches and, and did intentional RP trading deep dives.

Knowing that they were they were staff members that were going to be able to connect with teachers. So I think when we first started along this journey, there were a lot of questions of how this is how does this connect to instruction. And so we went back as a leadership team and said, Okay, we need to make sure that we're drawing explicit connections. And so bringing in the academic coaches as part of that work to it, and then connecting with teachers.

That has been something that's has received good feedback, both from the academic coaches, so they have more tools in their toolbox, when they go in and see a teacher that may need some more support in that area. But also good feedback from our staff, that we're bringing others along that can come in and make those connections for them. I also think at the building level, it's about really, as a leader, continuously taking the pulse with your leadership team and being in classrooms being on playgrounds being in the hallway, like all those common areas, and classrooms, of course, because that's where instruction happens, and really getting the pulse of what's going on, like are you seeing opening circles to anchor who's in the room that day? Are you seeing closing circles, all those components that we know are proactive and connecting with students. And just even those impromptu conversations, I feel like our leaders and our leadership teams are vulnerable enough to know like, hey, I need some help with this component, because I feel like this part is kind of falling apart. And then that's when they tap into some additional resources. But again, I feel like the way we did professional development and the continuous circling back, and even as we onboard new staff, they're trained also, with one of our train the trainers can be is really powerful, and is going to continue to make that impact that it needs to.

## Nekeya

That is awesome. And you're already seeing success. I know you guys are saying this early on, but I take a lot of stock in those anecdotal things that you're able to pull out, as you were sharing, I am curious about the student that's talking about circles are trying to have circles at the dinner table with their family, right, and staff members that are asking for help when they are not able to resolve conflict between each other. So those are

excellent examples of how you're moving in a positive direction. Everything that you all have done and your intention, though, professional learning of it is truly going to pay off with high dividends, I am sure just from what you're seeing so far in such an early stage of your implementation. So thank you so much for sharing that information with us.

## Vonetta

We want to thank you all really from the bottom of our hearts for taking the time to share your story with us to build some relationship and to give us some nuggets and some insight as we support other districts and schools to do this work. And so as we go, if there is one nugget of wisdom, one, you know, final gem or Jubal, that you would want to drop on us before our time ends today. What would you want to share with listeners, I would say in the state of Michigan, in the nation, around the work of restorative practices, and the impact that it is having a big nugget.

## Veronica

I would say this, I would say we often enter into things with a mindset of fixing someone or fixing a person so that they can form to what it is we want to have happen. I think that's a huge discovery for me, in all of this is every individual brings something to the table.

And before you start to look at what's on the table and in and what's right with it and what needs to be shifted, I think the first thing you have to do is turn that inward. And I think the better we get with that the better we're able to receive other people from where they are. I know I want to belong and so I'm assuming other people want to have that same sense of belonging. But it does take us to really take a deep dive into the data that we have forced to seek out data specific to that sense of belonging specific to us.

Our culture and really dig through that and be willing to have those open conversations in that open dialogue. And to have hear it from students, because when we hear, we have all these things that we believe, but when they say it is usually something different, they're coming at it from a different place. And we have to be able to hear that and be able to respond accordingly.

Now, that was beautiful. You said it was a big nugget, and I think you hit it. But here comes Carrie, come on, let's see, I'm going to actually build I wrote down right in front of your voice.

## Vonetta

So that's interesting, Veronica, that's, that's what you ended with you know, I feel like one of the biggest impacts with restorative practices, it is allowed everyone to have voice. And we know that people have voice. But when you have that child that just isn't comfortable talking in front of someone, and then eventually they end up being that leader. Or even if they're whispering in their teachers ear, they have an avenue to get their voice out there. And just starting to make those personal connections and relationships for children. And just knowing that they actually really do have a space, they're valued, and they matter. That feels like a winner to me.

## Andy

I totally agree with what both Veronica, Carrie have said, I think we let the whole child theme kind of carry us through like a strategic planning process. That was the number one area that our parents and staff identified as wanting to make sure that we prioritized and it's because of that data that we added staff, like SEL coaches, I think my nugget would be to before you just add staff to your district, be really intentional and think about what the reason is that you're going to add resources. And I think one one thing that we did well that Veronica was great at leading, was thinking about what is the role of SEL coach? And where are we going to be able to have the biggest impact? And I remember Tim Lewis, who is for Missouri PBIS, longtime professor Don Mizzou, talking about if you have an overwhelmed tier two and tier three system, it's a tier one problem. And so we said, Where are we going to get the best best bang for our buck, with with the staff members, it's going back to tier one and supporting tier one, so that all of our children are fair feeling the system that's supporting the whole child. So keeping that at the center of it, and when you're thinking about how you're using your resources, I believe it. So that is one of my messages that I always tell staffs, when they ask for support with MTSS. They're like, Oh, we got all these tier two and tier three, and I'm like, well, then that means you got to strengthen tier one, that means that your foundation is sagging, and let's work on that. So thank you all so much for affirming what we know works and what we know to be true and for sharing so much wisdom and heart and depth of knowledge and thinking and implementation of the work that you've done.

## Vonetta

Thank you. And we'll be looking forward to being able to set up some site visits to come out as you guys are implementing. Like I said, I really do see you all as an inspiration and you're similar demographics to so many of our districts here in Wayne County makes it even more exciting for us to see it actually happening for you guys and can't wait so looking forward to coming out that way. You said the words right out my mouth I was just gonna ask Could we come see this number we were happy with what we saw?

## **Veronica**

Absolutely. Yes.

## **Terrance**

It's always good to have others in the field to share and give feedback you're seeing and experiencing things that we are not so we can always learn from each other.

## **Marvin**

Absolutely. Absolutely and your word Sunil earlier the demographic information it made me think of the song Frankie Beverly and Maze, *We Are One*. And when we are working collectively as a group, we are so much stronger. So thank you for all of what you do. You are greatly appreciated. Have a wonderful day and we'll see you soon.