Using Punitive and Restorative Approaches Together

Adopting restorative practices does not mean that teachers or administrators will stop using punitive approaches.

- One way restorative and punitive methods are different is that participation in a restorative dialogue is voluntary. An offending student can choose not to participate in a dialogue with the people who have been affected, instead choosing to “submit to the system of discipline based on punishment.”
- The teacher decides whether a restorative dialogue is the “best approach for a situation, or if the punishment is. Restorative dialogue takes more time and in some ways is more challenging for everyone involved, although over the long run it is often the best approach.” The teacher may weigh considerations such as whether there is enough time and if the people who are involved “are likely to participate in a way that is respectful” which may more likely lead to effective results.
- “Punishment can have a positive psychological effect. By enduring a reasonable amount of fair punishment a student may feel that she has earned their way back into the good graces of the school community.

As a school community, it is valuable for teachers and disciplinarians using restorative practices to be clear about the operational applications of both approaches. In a circle process, it is valuable for teachers and staff acting as disciplinarians to consider questions such as these:

- “What have been our experiences with using punishment to manage student misbehavior? How is it working for us?
- What are some situations we’ve encountered where are efforts to manage misbehavior have been frustrating and not had the results we hoped for?
- How can restorative practices fit in with other methods we use?

Adapted from “Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles”, Amos Clifford, Center for Restorative Process.