

Maryland Commission on the School to Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices

January 22, 2018

1:00 – 4:00 pm

Lowe House Office Building
Prince George's County Delegation Room
Annapolis, Maryland

MINUTES

Commission Members Present:

Barbara Grochal, Center for Dispute Resolution, Maryland Carey Law (Chair)
Gavin Patashnik, Maryland Department of Juvenile Services
Michael Bunitsky, Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Robin McNair, Maryland State Education Association
Marla Posey-Moss, Maryland PTA
Aimee Evan, Maryland PTA
Walter Sallee, Maryland State Department of Education
Alonzo Washington, Maryland House of Delegates
Rhonda Richetta, City Spring Elementary School
Tiffany Nace, Snow Hill Middle School
Gail Sunderman, Maryland Equity Project
Shantay McKinily, Positive School Center
Kimberly Humphrey, American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland
Shamarla R. McCoy, Advocates for Children and Youth
Jenn Williams, Community Mediation Maryland designee
Matt Zernhelt, Community Conferencing Center
Tonia Ferguson, Arc of Maryland
Melanie Shapiro, Maryland Office of the Public Defender
Philip Leaf, Youth Leadership and Advocacy Network
Craig Minor, Youth Leadership and Advocacy Network
Deborah Thompson Eisenberg, Center for Dispute Resolution, Maryland Carey Law

Other Interested Parties Present:

Pam Queen, Maryland State Delegate
Alfa Stevens
Marone Brown
Shirley Brandman
Tina Dove, MSEA
Pat Gordon
Nanette Shweitzer

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Grochal called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm and welcomed all attendees.

Panel of Local School Experts on Restorative Practices Models

Chairperson Grochal moderated a panel of local principals, teachers, and providers of restorative practices and mediation in schools. The summary profiles of the panelists are attached with the Minutes. The questions asked by Ms. Grochal and the panelists' responses are summarized below:

1) Ms. Grochal asked the panelists to summarize what their schools/programs are doing relating to restorative practices (RP).

Robin McNair, Restorative Practices Coordinator, Prince George's County Public Schools

In June 2017, the Prince George's County Public Schools Board of Education passed a pilot program for restorative practices. Ms. McNair was hired as Restorative Practices Coordinator to oversee the implementation of restorative practices in seven schools. The first level of intervention in the RP pilot will be preventative, focusing on community-building circles with students. The second level will focus on conduct code violations. The level of response for code violations will determine who conducts the intervention, ranging from a trained educator or the school-based RP coordinator for lower levels and the RP Coordinator and an administrator for high level violations.

Ms. McNair emphasized that restorative practices focuses on the culture and climate and mindset of people in the school building. She believes RP improves relationships and decreases suspensions and expulsions. The school must create an infrastructure for RP.

Jenn Williams, Executive Director, Mid-Shore Community Mediation Center in Dorchester County

The Mid-Shore Community Mediation Center has close partnerships with middle and high schools in Dorchester County. The center conducts RP training and mediates student peer conflicts. These services are available to every school in the county. Ms. Williams has directed this program since 2012. The program is thriving. Mediation referrals have grown every year. The center conducts almost one mediation or restorative conference per day throughout the school year.

Tiffany Nace, Snow Hill Middle School, Worcester County Public Schools

Ms. Nace is a teacher at Snow Hill Middle School. The school was trained in RP and started to make circles a regular part of the school day during the 2015-16 academic year. Additional staff (behavior specialist, curriculum resource teacher, guidance counselors and administrative leaders) received additional restorative conference training.

Ms. Nace reported that they start the day with morning circles/morning meetings with students in every classroom. She said there have been "lots of successes and bumps in the road." She emphasized that RP is not a "fix all" – the administration expects instant results and is still struggling with the time it takes. She wishes there was more consistent professional development training – that piece is missing due to schedule restraints and training costs. Guidance and administration have been using RP – using circles/conferences rather than suspending students. RP has even been used for fighting incidents. She thinks

RP works well, but schools need to be careful with their expectations – RP is not a “cure all.”

Rhonda Richetta, City Springs Elementary School, Baltimore City Public Schools

Ms. Richetta has been principal at City Springs for eleven years. In her first year as principal, the environment was very different than it is today. Test scores were in single digits. She could not even address academic issues because all she was dealing with was very violent behavior, such as fighting. Teachers were not happy. Students came to school angry. She realized she needed to address culture and climate issues first. She investigated ways to improve school culture and found out about RP.

She went to the International Institute for Restorative Practices for a weeklong training in Bethlehem, PA. She obtained funding from the Open Society Institute to get RP off the ground. She got her entire staff trained in RP. She said it has been a journey and a transformational process. Staff are stuck in the mindset of suspensions, and that took time to change. RP is not a “magic wand.” The staff needs ongoing training and support. RP is about changing people’s mindsets. RP is not something we “Do”; it’s something we “are”. City Springs has integrated RP with other things they do. It has taken ten years, but she thinks “we have it now.” But it takes constant vigilance. She backed off support for RP at one point; new staff was brought in without RP training, and the culture started to regress. She now provides on-going reinforcement in RP. The year before she started RP, there were 83 suspensions in a student population of 300. In 2017, with a larger population of 770 students, there were 32 suspensions. She says schools need training and support for staff for implementation to take hold.

Suzanne McMurtray, Homewood Center, Howard County Public Schools

Ms. McMurtray is the ARL Liaison Teacher, Gateway High School Team Leader and HCPSS PBIS Coach. She came to RP through PBIS. Homewood has been ‘restorative’ since 2012. The school came to RP out of the need to address girls in conflict, especially regarding social media disputes. They experimented with using the community mediation center in Howard County (Maryland Conflict Resolution Center) to facilitate a girls’ restorative circle. In this facilitated circle, the students in conflict committed to safety and agreed to various ways to keep peace in the building. It worked, and the school decided to implement RP more broadly.

Homewood got a grant through the now defunct Maryland Judiciary and Center for Dispute Resolution school conflict resolution grants program. They received training for 20 champions of RP. And seeing was believing. Teachers wanted to use RP because they saw that it worked. Attendance went up. Office referrals for misconduct decreased by 75%. Dropout rate decreased by 50%. Ms. McMurtray shared a slide of data (attached) that reflects other outcomes.

She said that RP is about investing in community and relationship building on the front-end, which reaps benefits on the “back end” in better classroom climate and less misconduct.

2) Ms. Grochal asked the panelists to identify the challenges in implementing RP and how they can be addressed.

Robin: the RP pilot has just started in Prince George's County. The county and teachers' union collaborated to bring RP to Prince George's. One challenge is fear of being mandated. Some worry that it means schools cannot suspend students anymore, which is not true. RP makes the need for suspensions less likely but does not take that tool away. The big challenge is fear of the unknown. We need to educate the educators about how RP changes school culture. Some schools don't want anything imposed on them.

Suzanne: teacher and leadership turnover. As new teachers and administrators come to the school, they need to be trained quickly. Time is always a challenge. There are constraints of curriculum, other teacher training, and testing pulling on time.

Jenn: maintaining momentum and staff buy-in and dealing with turnover. They need to reeducate staff members consistently. They need to fight fatigue that comes with investment of time. Teachers may need to be present for conferences or mediation and that can be difficult to fit into the school day as currently structured. Teachers' unions needs to be heard in this discussion because of the impact on teacher time. Fear of the unknown also is a challenge. RP resonates with some teachers, but some are terrified of looking vulnerable. There is a need to change the mindset and overcome teacher fears.

Tiffany: professional development. School staff need support and consulting. A training and support person needs to be in place to train new teachers on team every year. There needs to be a RP support system in place.

Rhonda: the challenges are all adult problems. The children respond positively to RP, not all of the adults do. Time is a precious resource. If schools are expected to do RP, the time issue needs to be addressed. RP requires a change in philosophy. Teachers need to see it to believe it. We need to create more opportunities for non-believers to see RP working somewhere. We need more collaboration between those schools using RP and those not doing it.

Suzanne: money is a burden. We need to train all staff effectively – every staff member in every school.

Tiffany: their school is in the midst of many different shifts. The curriculum is changing. They now have no homework. Parents and society are struggling with all of this "new" stuff. It's not what they think a traditional school/classroom looks like. That transition is a difficult process to go through.

Rhonda: parents want children to be suspended. When we have talked to parents about RP, we have to deal with a lot of myths they have. The challenge is to dispel the myths about RP—such as the myth that RP is permissive and has no consequences. They provided RP training to parents because it was just as hard a sell to parents as it was for teachers. But parents started to see the benefits. In some cases, long-standing rivalries in the community

were getting resolved. She realized the impact RP was making when a parent requested a restorative conference with another parent.

3) Ms. Grochal asked how schools can ensure sustainability of RP. What is needed?

Suzanne: she needs to write grants for RP training. There also should be broader professional learning for students in RP across all schools. Homewood is an alternative school, with 70% African-American populations. Something should have been done before these students got to Homewood.

Jenn: what has helped in Dorchester is the partnership model between community mediation and the schools. Conferences and mediations take time, and the centers can leverage resources in a way that no educator time is required for peer mediation. They also seek diverse funding sources to support the program

Robin: every school needs a RP Coordinator, whose sole job is to support restorative practices in the school.

Barbara added: there is a need to build capacity at the district level and then the state level. Every district should have a plan.

Jenn: agrees that every district and every school building should have a RP coordinator, maybe more than one. At some schools, teams of folks would be more ideal.

Rhonda: having outsiders responsible for RP enables teachers to not buy in and interferes with sustainability. Having internal expertise, leadership and support for RP is important. They need funding for RP training—as many are currently relying on grants.

4) Ms. Grochal asked what is in place around quality assurance.

Jenn: inclusive model of mediation includes a quality assurance component and consistent training. Also it includes feedback from partners and schools every year, as well as evaluations by participants after every mediation or RP conference. They also have a manual of best practices that every team member has. They also come together regularly to debrief challenging circles and situations and provide professional opportunity for reflection.

Rhonda: training for new staff. We use weekly collaborative team meetings, using circle. Every meeting has a standing agenda item during which teachers can bring up particular issues/challenges and others can offer restorative strategies. In the classroom, daily circles are required. Teachers put a circle topic in their lesson plan every day.

Robin: there were some “non-negotiables” for the RP pilot. It has to be whole-school approach. All adults will get RP trainings, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, office staff, teachers, etc. Leadership meetings always start in circles. The goal is to build

community and relationships. We are data driven, looking at attendance, discipline, referral data, race. There is on-going professional development in RP, child development, trauma, the brain and learning, students with disabilities. The administrative staff need to be trained. There needs to be a school climate team. The staff needs to be engaged in decision-making. District support is necessary.

5) Ms. Grochal asked the panelists to name one or two key points that are crucial to include in the Commission's report to the Legislature.

Robin: RP is not just a tool for intervention and is not only about suspensions. RP builds communities and repairs harm. The goal is community-building and improving school climate. RP takes time.

Rhonda: Colleges and universities should include RP in their teacher training programs so all teachers know about RP. The Commission's report should address the myths about RP and how to address them, or it will be a mess.

Don't present the policy without the "how to" and "non-negotiable" things that need to happen. You can't let people figure those out. People need to be told what is required to be successful.

Suzanne: need leadership and heart for the work at the helm (principal and leadership team).

Jenn: need training. Teachers and school resource officers need to be trained to "create community on purpose." Need quality assurance and monitoring. There needs to be a level of accountability if something is prescribed. How are staff going to be trained? How will it be reinforced? How will teachers be held accountable for doing this? Some teachers are not equipped to handle serious issues.

Rhonda: allow time to make it happen. Schools only have about 10 days of professional development per year. When are we going to get the training? The schedule needs to build in time for training and on-going support.

Tiffany: have to support teachers and schools. Every school needs a restorative practices coordinator and constant professional development on restorative practices.

The panel answered questions from Commission members. Some key points that came out of their comments include:

- Parents need to be trained so they understand restorative practices.
- A "discipline" flow chart would help schools understand how to use processes and steps in the process.
- Students need to have a voice - Assistant principals should not be the "go-to" persons for all discipline, especially lower-level issues.
- School leadership is important.

- University teacher training programs play a role here – all teachers should be trained in this as part of their initial training.
- Schools need a restorative practices coordinator.
- The highest cost of the training is teacher leave time. A typical introductory RP training takes 3-4 days.
- We should coordinate our work with the Kirwan Commission.
- We need better data.
- We need to understand how this relates to the ban on suspensions for pre-K-second grade students.
- We also need student-focused trainings – students can lead circles and learn to resolve problems and conflicts effectively on their own.
- District leaders need RP training.

School Arrest Data

Walter Sallee then presented a recent report from MSE about School Arrest Data from local school systems. The report is downloadable here:

<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/index.aspx>

Mr. Sallee said this report does not analyze the numbers or root causes, but MSDE will be conducting that data for future reporting. This presents the arrest data as certified and reported by each local district. Mr. Sallee recognized that the report begs a lot of questions. MSDE needs to take a look behind these numbers to analyze discernable patterns.

Delegate Washington commented that the report is alarming. He requested that MSDE work to put this data in a more user friendly format and provide analysis of what this means and how it impacts our kids. For example, what does this reveal about the school-to-prison pipeline? How many of these arrests were seniors? Did they graduate? We need a more granular level of detail about why these students were arrested and what happened after the arrests.

Mr. Sallee said this was the first time arrest data was collected in this way, but many questions remain. What do they mean? Why does one school system have more arrests than others? What practices are in place in those districts that have no or very low arrests? Is there anything that can be done to mitigate the situation prior to a referral for arrest?

Melanie Shapiro pointed out that “other” is the second highest category for arrests. She suggested that uniform offense definitions be used – perhaps use the definitions from the Maryland code.

A discussion ensued about the need to track and include data regarding LGBTQ students and students with disabilities.

Members asked whether the data could be linked to other academic achievement data, perhaps linking by student id numbers. That could provide important information about the school-to-prison pipeline as the Commission makes its recommendations.

Youth Engagement

The Commission began to discuss ideas about getting youth voices for the Commission's consideration.

Craig Minor and Phil Leaf provided some ideas about how to get youth involvement and stories. One idea is to visit schools to talk to youth directly. Another idea may be to link students into a Commission meeting via an internet conversation. Jenn Williams mentioned that Dorchester County schools would welcome a Commission meeting at the school.

Ms. Grochal said a subcommittee will continue to work on strategies for collecting youth input from around the state.

The meeting adjourned at 4:05 pm.