

Maryland Commission on the School to Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices

April 23, 2018

1:00 – 4:00 pm

Krongard Room

University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of

Law Baltimore, Maryland 21201

MINUTES – SUMMARY

Attendees

Barbara Grochal - Chair

Walter Sallee - Maryland State Department of Education designee

Michael Bunitsky - Maryland Association of Boards of Education designee

Robin McNair - Maryland State Education Association designee

Marla Posey-Moss - Maryland PTA designee

Gail Sunderman - Executive Director, Maryland Equity Project

Rhonda Richetta - Principal (Baltimore City Public Schools)

Kimberly Humphrey - American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland designee

Melanie Shapiro - Maryland Public Defender designee

Shamarla McCoy - Advocates for Children and Youth designee

Lorig Charkoudian - Executive Director, Community Mediation Maryland

Phillip Leaf - Executive Director, Youth Leadership and Advocacy Network, Johns

Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Tiffany Nace - Teacher (Worcester County Public Schools)

Deborah Eisenberg - Faculty Director, Center for Dispute Resolution, University of

Maryland Francis Carey School of Law

Shantay McKinily - Positive School Center

Aimee Evan - Maryland PTA

Gavin Patashnik - Maryland Department of Juvenile Services designee

Jennifer Williams - Youth Program Director, Mid Shore Community Mediation Center

Barbara Sherrod - Restorative Practices Specialist, Community Conferencing Center

Emily Ames-Messinger, University of Maryland School of Social Work

Cythia Jurrius - Mid Shore Community Mediation Center

Marone Brown - Maryland State Department of Education

Sylvia Lawson - Maryland State Department of Education

Richard Chambers - Conflict Resolution Center of Baltimore County

Pat Marks

Elder Doug Wilson

Victoria Hammer – Guest Speaker, United States Department of Education

Nancy Riestenberg – Guest Speaker (via remote connection), Minnesota Department of Education

Call To Order and Opening Remarks

Chairperson Grochal welcomed the committee members and other attendants. She invited committee members to sign up for a workgroup to focus on specific goals of the committee over the summer.

Restorative Practices and Evidence Presentation

Victoria Hammer is Acting Director of the Policy and Program Studies Service with the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development at the United States Department of Education. She shared her insights on how Restorative Practices (RP) in schools can be advanced in the current political and regulatory landscape:

The current administration seeks to emphasize state and local agency over education programs. This gives communities more flexibility to apply interventions but may result in less access to research in low-capacity areas. The federal government is not providing major funding for education. A few funding streams for Social and Emotional Learning are available through Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—Titles I, II, and IV—which uses a four-tier framework to rate the evidence base (EB) of educational interventions. While a higher EB tier increases access to federal funding under Titles I and II, practical challenges impede causal evidence for RP in schools. RP is currently supported by correlative evidence and is considered a “promising practice,” the third tier in the EB framework. The Title IV omnibus bill supports well-rounded education, safe and healthy students, and effective use of technology. Funding through Title IV requires a needs assessment and allocation of funds to program evaluation. In addition to pursuing empirical evidence, RP should be advanced in consideration of broader goals, such as improving school climate.

Scaling Up Restorative Practices

Nancy Riestenberg is a School Climate Specialist with the Minnesota Department of Education and author of *Circle in the Square*. She joined the committee via conference call to present an illustrative case of scaling up RP at an Alternative Learning Center (ALC) in Carlton County, MN:

Effective Restorative Justice (RJ) requires the belief that humans are worthy and rational beings who operate in relationship. There are three concentric circles of restorative justice in education: (1) repairing relationships, (2) building and maintaining relationships, and (3) allowing every student to see themselves reflected in the school. Mindful compassion, empathetic communication, small restorative conversations, circles, and restorative conferences are in the array of restorative practices that can be implemented in schools. In Minnesota, schools have found that circles and restorative conferences are the most impactful.

RJ practices in prison laid the groundwork for RP at the ALC in Carlton County, MN. An RJ council was established at the local prison to help inmates address conflict, and a law was passed that required “circle sentencing” for first time juvenile defenders. Students who had experienced RJ first-hand through the prison or alternative sentencing eventually attended the ALC and were already familiar with some RP.

The ALC’s successful scale up relies upon viewing RP as a consistent part of daily life for the entire school community. In addition to daily circling for the students, there are quarterly RP days for the entire school as well as regular self-care and reflective group meetings for staff. A training is conducted before the start of each school year to refresh returning teachers and orient new ones. Student Ambassadors are an important resource for new students becoming familiarized with the ALC and RP. The school’s implementation team meets with a coach and consultant monthly, and administrators regularly attend meetings at the prison to discuss insights with inmates who have been through the school to prison pipeline. While implementation can seem cumbersome, the short run investments are returned through more effective education and efficient use of school time in the long run. Since the program began, the school’s discipline referrals have reduced by more than half and the graduation rate increased by ten percent. This year, the school was ALC of the Year.

Dorchester County Youth Engagement

Lorig Charkoudian, committee member and Executive Director of Community Mediation Maryland, shared video clips and insights from the recent Youth Engagement Day in Dorchester County:

The Youth Engagement Day in Dorchester County was an important step toward making sure we hear from young people about their experiences with RP, especially what is going well and what is not going well. In the first session, Jen Williams, who supports RP at the school, got the first circle session started by mentioning circle guidelines, but students soon began sharing deep issues and showing empathy for one another. The most important aspect of the circle is participation. During one focus group, students talked about the mediation and facilitative processes that it took to build trust. Students expressed that they felt a sense of chaos before circling and class guidelines. The new class norms make it easier for students to focus on school work and other interests. In another focus group, students expressed nuanced opinions that grappled with both the pit-falls and practical realities of suspensions. Students also discussed their relationship with the school resource officer. While some felt neutral or positive toward the resource officer, others perceived racial bias; however, these opinions were not split along racial divides. The principle of the school talked about the impact RP is having on the school and the importance of getting the right people to buy in. The program has progressed over the last six to seven years, and students may now opt-in to mediation to reduce suspensions. Working with the school, Jen has noticed that often teachers need more guidance and support to embrace RP than the students. It is important to convey that RP is not an additional burden; rather, it fits in and can improve the school for everyone.

Closing Remarks

Chairperson Grochal thanked everyone for attending, especially those who volunteered for a work group. The committee will reconvene in June.