

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Marnell A. Cooper
*Chair, Baltimore City Board of
School Commissioners*

Gregory E. Thornton, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer

July 13, 2015

The Honorable Bernard C. "Jack" Young
President, Baltimore City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: Position Statement
City Council Resolution 15-0232R

Dear Council President Young:

On June 1, 2015 the Baltimore City Council introduced the above-captioned bill (Resolution), concerning steps to be taken by Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) to systematically integrate lessons in non-violent conflict resolution into its K-12 curriculum to help provide our children with the conflict resolution skills they will need to succeed in life.

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) recognizes non-violent conflict resolution as an essential skill and constructive approach towards teaching students how to peacefully resolve interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. As evidenced by recent events in Baltimore City, it is critical for school communities to adopt a comprehensive, restorative approach toward building a culture of respect and care. This concept of school-based restorative practices is a social philosophy that focuses on building social capital and achieving social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making. It focuses on relationships as a key component to learning, growth, and a positive school climate for students and adults.

Beginning in SY2011-12, City Schools initiated a pilot partnership with the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) in three schools. To date, more than 24 schools have adopted the comprehensive, whole-school strategy of restorative practices as a constructive, proactive approach toward conflict resolution. As a result of implementation, the following outcomes are often demonstrated in the participating school communities:

- Rebuilding trust and restoring safety within the community;
- Shifting expectations for disciplinary response towards restorative approaches where possible;
- Reducing violence and bullying within the school community;
- Repairing harm done by wrongdoing to the greatest extent possible;
- Holding offenders directly accountable to those that they have harmed;
- Providing victims a direct voice in the process of restoring relationships; and

- Building a caring school community that supports students, staff, and administrators in feeling connected and respected, which enhances learning outcomes.

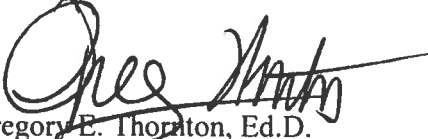
In addition to Restorative Practices, school communities are utilizing the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework to support positive school climate. Successful implementation of PBIS requires that schools develop or procure lessons to support students in learning and mastering various social skills, including conflict resolution. The fundamental premise of both interventions is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive (and more likely to make positive changes) when those in authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them.

City Schools recognizes that the field of restorative practices has significant implications for all aspects of society; from families, classrooms, schools and prisons to workplaces, associations, governments, and even whole nations. City Schools is therefore proactively pairing and expanding conflict resolution programming with the traditional instructional curriculum. As a result, it is anticipated that the use of these practices will contribute to the continued reduction of misbehavior, bullying, violence and crime among students, while improving the overall climate for learning. In addition, these practices will teach vital life skills that will assist students to succeed in college, career, and life.

City Schools will be pleased to testify regarding the steps being taken to help provide our children with the conflict resolution skills they will need to succeed in life.

Thank you for inviting City Schools to participate in this process.

Sincerely,


Gregory E. Thornton, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer