



Legislation Text

File #: 22-0133R, Version: 0

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Introductory*

City of Baltimore Council Bill R (Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Cohen

A Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning **Request for City Action - Calling on Dr. Sonja Santelises and the Baltimore City Public School System to Implement Restorative Practices**

For the purpose of calling upon the CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System, Dr. Sonja Santelises, the Chief of Schools, John Davis, and the Board of School Commissioners to create an expedited plan to implement foundational restorative practices training in all City schools before the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Restorative practices (RP) is an evidenced-based approach to teaching young people conflict resolution, mediation, and accountability. School districts around the country have increasingly implemented RP to improve institutional climate by building meaningful relationships in school communities, reframing school discipline, and supporting student safety, well-being, and success. This transformational approach centers student voice and agency and enhances student engagement and participation in their own learning.

In April 2018, the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) CEO Sonja Santelises committed that Baltimore City would become a restorative practices district by 2023. Together with The Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Family League of Baltimore, BCPSS committed to developing a strategic plan to, at a minimum, implement restorative circles in all Baltimore City schools.

Certain BCPSS schools began implementing restorative practices and receiving intensive coaching and training during the 2018-2019 school year. A study conducted during that year by the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) found that restorative practices in City Schools led to a significant improvement in school climate and a major reduction in suspensions. At the request of OSI-Baltimore, JHU conducted a review of the implementation status in the RP schools in the City and released a subsequent report in October 2019, after the first full year of adopting the practice. The report indicated promising results at these early stages in addition to noting areas for continued improvement, stating “Overall, JHU found that since the implementation of restorative practices in the RP schools: Suspensions decreased in the RP schools by an impressive 44% in one year; The vast majority of school staff reported that restorative practices improved school climate and strengthened relationships among and between teachers and students”. The report recommended City-wide implementation of RP in all schools, and for all school staff, within 3 to 5 years.

Despite commitments and pilot success, BCPSS leadership has been slow to adopt this strategy City-wide. Only 36 City schools are currently implementing RP practices, and only one-third of City schools (53) have received school-wide training in this strategy. Additionally, a time line has not been published indicating when staff at all City schools will be trained in RP.

City schools have made some meaningful steps toward their pledge to implement RP that should be acknowledged. In 2019, BCPSS added an additional 21 schools with an integrated focus on both RP and Social Emotional Learning, for a total of 56 “wholeness intensive learning sites”. Additionally, 36 City schools received foundational training for all staff on RP, with a focus on core concepts and the implementation of community-building circles. School leaders and key staff at those schools also received on-going coaching. BCPSS has also worked with an outside provider to offer coaching to administrators at 15 City schools to help leaders build RP cultures in their schools and to take more restorative and equitable approaches to discipline, emphasizing a reduction in suspensions. Finally, BCPSS leadership has worked to integrate RP into the language of policies, regulations, and Student Code of Conduct.

Despite these steps forward, this past school year gave rise to multiple incidents of violence and weapons found within City Schools. Two-thirds of City schools have still not had access to this critical strategy for reducing violence and combating further aggression. The City of Baltimore has always been committed to the holistic safety and well-being of its youth. Indeed, we are the first city in the nation to have legislated trauma-informed care into our policies and city agencies. Therefore, the City Council asks that this known best practice be swiftly scaled to ensure all students in our City receive the critical support they need to resolve conflict and support student safety, well-being, and success.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, That the City Council calls upon the CEO of BCPSS, Dr. Sonja Santelises, Chief of Schools, John Davis, and the Board of School Commissioners to create an expedited plan to implement foundational restorative practices training in all City schools before the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Baltimore City Public School System CEO and Chief of Schools, the Board Chair of the Board of School Commissioners, and the Mayor’s legislative liaison to the City Council.