

**HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE  
HOUSE BILL 202: RESTORATIVE SCHOOLS FUND AND GRANTS - ESTABLISHMENT**

**January 30, 2020**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Positive Schools Center (PSC), part of the University of Maryland, School of Social Work partners with schools and districts to identify, collaborate and provide support around issues related to school climate and punitive discipline. The PSC is also a member of the Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (“CRSD”) and was an appointed representative on the Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, who completed its Final Report and Collaborative Action Plan in December 2018. **The PSC strongly supports HB 202**, which would establish a state-level fund to support local school systems implementation of restorative approaches in schools as a means of preventing and addressing student behavior concerns.

The PSC currently works with 25 Baltimore City Public Schools as a part of our Intensive Climate Cohort (ICC), where we provide comprehensive restorative approaches training and coaching. Just this week my team members were in one of our middle schools where a fight broke out among students. The administration handled the situation restoratively by holding a conference with the student immediately, where he willingly apologized. This demonstrates the student’s self-awareness and social-emotional skills. The teacher then held a restorative circle in their classroom so all parties involved could feel heard and take a moment to calm down before settling back into instruction. Because of the way this situation was handled, no one was suspended, the fight didn’t disrupt the learning of the rest of the class, and the situation was handled as a team. That is what happens in a positive school climate. This shows our students they can be human, they can make mistakes, but they will still be held accountable without their right to learn being taken away.

In the first quarter of the school year last year, this school had 17 suspensions. In the first quarter of the school year this year, this school had 3 suspensions. This dramatic shift in their school climate didn’t happen overnight and didn’t happen by magic. Our work with this school began in the summer of 2018. Over the course of two years, we have provided 45 hours of trauma, social-emotional learning, and racial equity training for school staff to develop a fundamental understanding of restorative approaches, spent over 15 hours on intensive individual coaching with school leadership, and provided opportunities for staff members to become trainers to build their internal capacity. This year we’ve begun a series of three hour structured observations, called climate walks, where we observe the school’s implementation and provide focused feedback. Making all of this happen requires the hard

work of our staff, certified restorative practices coaches, logistical scheduling support, and training materials. All of which require funding. This intensive commitment isn't forever. This school has built so much internal capacity that they are becoming self-sufficient and are about to transition out of our program this year.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health found that ongoing learning communities within an organization are crucial in supporting organizational leaders and frontline staff in building and implementing new skills<sup>1</sup>. Research on implementation science suggests that most skills can be introduced in training but are learned on the job with the help of a coach. Studies have found that about 10 percent of what is taught in training is transferred to the job. When on the job coaching was added to the training, 95 percent of trainees used the skills they were taught in the training<sup>2</sup>.

By passing HB0725 in 2019, the Maryland General Assembly acknowledged that restorative approaches are beneficial for schools and students, but little can be done without funding. The significant upfront dollar investment in restorative approaches implementation ultimately costs less money than the alternatives of teacher burnout and turnover, high suspension rates, student dropout, and alternate student services. If we want to see results similar to this school across Maryland and continue to create positive results for schools and students, we need a dedicated funding stream for restorative approaches implementation in Maryland.

**For these reasons, the PSC strongly supports House Bill 202.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Christina Koch  
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<sup>1</sup> Learning for Action. (September 2017) About the Trauma Transformed Initiative. Learning for Action. Retrieved from <http://traumatransformed.org/wp-content/uploads/Trauma-Transformed-Year-3-Evaluation-Executive-Summary-Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Fixsen, D., Blase, K., Naoom, S., and Wallace, F. (May 27, 2009). Core Implementation Components. Research on Social Work Practice. 19: 531-540. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/21ec/1b0a3e12a2cf9d64831306de556561d0703e.pdf>



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