

ADVOCATES



FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

To: Chair Kaiser and members of the Ways and Means Committee
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director
Re: House Bill 202: Restorative Schools Fund and Grants - Establishment
Date: January 30, 2020
Position: Support

The Maryland General Assembly created the Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices (STTP) in 2017. The legislation “appointed an interdisciplinary group of educators, representatives from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and Department of Juvenile Services, stakeholders, and experts to study current disciplinary practices in Maryland public schools and recommend best practices with respect to restorative approaches to school discipline that foster school climates most conducive to learning” and resulted in a report to the General Assembly at the end of 2018.

In 2019, the General Assembly failed to pass the majority of legislation resulting from the STTP report, including an earlier iteration of this bill, HB 1229. In our testimony in support of that bill, we expressed the distinct need to pass funding legislation:

“We cannot expect county boards of education to implement restorative approaches to discipline with fidelity if we are unwilling to invest financially in their ability to evaluate current practices, plan for their reforms, train their staff, and provide consistent support through the implementation of these reforms.”¹

In the interim, we have spoken to students, school staff, and school system administrators from across the state, including those in Allegany, Washington, Charles, Baltimore, Anne Arundel, and Montgomery counties, about the use of restorative approaches to student discipline. The prevailing theme in those conversations is a simple one: **the desire to implement non-punitive methods of student discipline, particularly restorative approaches, exists. However, the lack of funding provided by the state to local education agencies serves as a massive barrier to implementation with fidelity.**

As it was last year, this issue is urgent. In the 2018-2019 school year, 40,322 students were suspended or expelled from school—an increase of 1,820 students over last year’s figure. In this time period, those students accounted for 79,306 instances of suspensions and expulsions—a disturbing jump of 15,700 more cases since the previous year. Clearly, the status quo is not working to keep students safe, in school, and on track for success.

¹ Advocates for Children and Youth, 2019

This year, the General Assembly will also take up the recommendations of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Public Education (Kirwan Commission), including new, transformational investments in Maryland's students and schools and a Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Frankly, **the Blueprint investment will not yield desired results if we continue to allow tens of thousands of students to be pushed out of school.** Moreover, given the disparities in who is subject to exclusionary discipline—Black students and students with educational disabilities specifically—**Maryland stands no chance of closing the student academic achievement gap if we do not jointly address the operational circumstances of our schools and the way students are treated when they enter them.**

ACY strongly urges a favorable report on HB 202 and would be extremely supportive of efforts to include the funding offered by the bill in the larger Blueprint legislation expected later this Session.

Advocates for Children and Youth builds a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth can achieve their full potential.

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