

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and esteemed members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

As a retired public school teacher in Harford County I urge your favorable report on SB917 Restorative Schools as an essential intervention in realizing the immense positive benefit to our schoolchildren of the MD Blueprint.

The Blueprint's effectiveness requires a change in classroom culture where students and teachers feel appreciated and their voices are heard. The numbers on school suspensions, student absenteeism, teacher turn-over and student mental health concerns all point to a failure in culture as well as services. Such numbers are unacceptable, and the Blueprint will not be nearly as effective in changing them if we don't change school culture at the same time.

SB917 (HB 1257) provides a research-based solution that will create a culture in all Maryland schools where all students can thrive and no one is left behind.

The provisions in SB 917 call for:

1. A restorative coach in each Restorative School. A restorative coach's primary responsibility is to work with all other staff in understanding and building the tools, mind-set, the way of life that a Restorative School reflects.
2. The requisite training. As each school begins its transformation, ALL staff... the principal, the teachers, the bus drivers, the cafeteria workers would ALL receive at least two days of training. Refresher training would occur annually.
3. Establishing the Restorative School as an essential characteristic of a successful school as a matter of state policy. The Maryland State Department of Education is charged with developing a comprehensive plan in consultation with stakeholders to bring Restorative Schools to scale over 12 years.

Please go to WBAL Video Restorative Schools for on-sight evidence of the benefits of Restorative Practices in a Baltimore school.

Our children deserve the best that we can provide to them. They are our nation's future.

For these reasons I strongly urge your favorable report on SB 917.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Gardner

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