

BILL: HB1257 – Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools - Establishment **DATE:** February 28, 2024

SUBJECT: Letter of Information **COMMITTEE:** House Ways & Means

POSITION: No Position

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The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing this letter of information on House Bill (HB) 1257 - *Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Establishment*.

HB 1257

HB 1257 requires MSDE to develop a comprehensive plan to implement Restorative Practices Schools. MSDE, in conjunction with the Maryland Consortium of Coordinated Community Supports (Consortium), will identify persons qualified to provide restorative practices training to restorative practices coaches and school personnel. The comprehensive plan developed under this bill must establish timelines for the completion of training for restorative practices coaches, behavioral health coordinators, and school personnel in 50 schools on or before July 30, 2026, and in all public schools in the state on or before June 30, 2036.

Restorative Approaches

HB 1257 requires the implementation of “restorative practices” as defined in the bill. The term “restorative approaches” is used in Education Article § 7-306, which defines restorative approaches as “a relationship-focused student discipline model.” The statute lists nine practices that are restorative practices. Research from the Learning Policy Institute suggests that the use of restorative practices can lead to a reduction in both the rates and duration of suspensions and can also enhance academic achievement (See: [Fostering belonging, transforming schools: The impact of restorative practices](#)). However, the desired outcomes are contingent upon several factors including the specific practices employed, fidelity of implementation, and staff capacity.

Current Activities

In Education Article § 7-306, “alternative school discipline practices” are defined as any disciplinary practice employed in a public school that does not involve in-school or out-of-school suspension. MSDE has been providing support and guidance to local education agencies (LEAs) on these alternative disciplinary approaches. This is achieved through collaborative partnerships with expert organizations such as the Center for Dispute Resolution at the University of Maryland (C-DRUM).

Currently, MSDE is engaging in monthly collaborations with LEA leaders specializing in restorative practices. The aim is to provide professional learning opportunities and share valuable resources. MSDE has published several documents to guide LEAs towards a more restorative approach to student discipline. These include *The Maryland Guidelines for a State Code of Discipline*, *Maryland's Model Policy on Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation*, and *A Trauma-Informed Approach for Maryland Schools*.

MSDE Support and Operational impact

MSDE supports the goals of HB 1257 to expand implementation of the restorative practices framework with fidelity in Maryland's public schools. MSDE will work with the Consortium to ensure that evidence-based practices are utilized, by creating a list of training programs for school personnel to implement schoolwide restorative practices designed to strengthen and improve school climate to promote positive student achievement outcomes. This work will include monitoring and disseminating updated research regarding the most effective restorative practices and best practices on implementation and training. Recommended programs will recognize the disproportionality of classroom management referrals. The effective and sustained implementation of restorative practices has the potential to reduce the disproportionate use of punitive measures and contribute to a safer environment for all students.

MSDE would need to dedicate staff to this task. MSDE will need a full time Specialist and additional funding to create data systems to collect data required under this bill that MSDE does not currently collect including student office referrals, and teacher turnover and absenteeism rates. The development of the comprehensive plan will include stakeholder input, and timelines for training.

HB 1257 requires that the plan establish standards for when a school may be designated a restorative practices school. This work is crucial as the term "restorative practices" can be broadly interpreted to encompass a range of strategies. The standards will include intended outcomes and performance metrics that the use of restorative practices will achieve, including disciplinary actions taken, student absenteeism and truancy, rates of teacher turnover and absenteeism, relevant mental health indicators, and school climate indicators. The plan must establish school-level and LEA level data collection and reporting standards and requirements.

Discipline Data

The Maryland Annotated Code § 7-306 of the Education Article requires MSDE to provide an annual report to the General Assembly on the uses of restorative approaches in the State and a review of disciplinary practices and policies within the State. Additionally, Section 7-306 requires that MSDE disaggregate student discipline data by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, eligibility for free or reduced-price meals or an equivalent measure of socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and type of discipline for the State, each LEA, and each public school. Provisions in HB 1257 requiring certain data and disaggregation thereof may be duplicative of existing law.

MSDE respectfully submits this letter of information for your review and consideration. Please contact Akilah Alleyne, Ph.D., Executive Director of Governmental Affairs, at 410-767-0504, akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov, if additional information is needed.