

**TO:** House Ways and Means Committee

**BILL:** House Bill (HB) 197 – Public High Schools – Restorative Practices Schools - Comprehensive Plan

**DATE:** January 29, 2025

**POSITION:** Support

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The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are providing this testimony in support of House Bill (HB) 197 – Public High Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Comprehensive Plan which requires MSDE to develop a comprehensive plan by July 1, 2026, for the establishment of Restorative Practices Schools.

HB 197 mandates that MSDE create a comprehensive plan for implementing Restorative Practices Schools. The bill defines “restorative practices” and outlines requirements for the plan, including establishing training materials and identifying performance metrics. County boards of education are required to use the comprehensive plan when establishing such schools. The bill also includes reporting requirements for the Department, detailing data collection on student discipline and the use of restorative practices.

The proposed legislation emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships, setting clear expectations, and focusing on repairing harm when violations occur. It also seeks to move from a framework of punishment and traditional discipline towards a model that prioritizes relationships, accountability, and community well-being, and aims to foster student well-being and positive school climates. This approach, which includes elements like conflict resolution, mediation, and social-emotional learning, has the potential to reduce disciplinary actions like suspensions and expulsions and create a more positive school climate.

Currently, many schools rely on punitive measures that often fail to address the root causes of student misbehavior. HB 197 seeks to change this by emphasizing a relationship-focused, preventative approach through restorative practices. The bill defines "restorative practices" as a model that is communally and culturally responsive, and that focuses on building relationships and setting clear behavioral expectations. When these expectations are not met, the focus is on accountability for harm done, as well as repairing the relationships that were affected.

The bill specifies that restorative practices can include conflict resolution, mediation, peer mediation, circle processes, restorative conferences, social-emotional learning, trauma-informed care, and positive behavioral intervention support. These are all evidence-based methods of addressing behavior that will lead to more positive and productive outcomes in schools. These practices are intended to be integrated into the daily activities of the whole school.

HB 197 mandates the State Department of Education to develop a comprehensive plan for establishing Restorative Practices Schools by July 1, 2026. This plan will provide a framework for local school systems that choose to adopt this model. The plan will include:

- A framework for identifying school personnel to serve as restorative practice coaches.

- Model training materials for those coaches to train other staff.
- Standards for when a school may be designated a Restorative Practices School.
- Intended outcomes and performance metrics, including improvements in student conduct, absenteeism, teacher turnover, mental health, and school climate.

The bill also emphasizes that the primary purpose of any disciplinary measure should be rehabilitative, restorative, and educational. By focusing on repairing harm and strengthening relationships, rather than simply punishing students, we can create a more supportive and nurturing environment for all students and staff. This is supported by the fact that the bill requires the State Department of Education to provide technical assistance to county boards regarding the use of restorative practices.

HB 197 requires the Department to collect and report data on the use of restorative practices and alternative discipline measures. The discipline data will be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, socioeconomic status, and English language proficiency. This is important to ensure that these programs serve all students equitably.

In implementing HB 197, MSDE will support schools seeking to transform school culture. Restorative Practices are designed to create learning environments where students feel safe, respected, and connected. It is about investing in students and their futures. We know that strong relationships are the foundation for successful learning and that a focus on restorative practices will improve school climate and student well-being.

MSDE respectfully requests consideration of these comments as HB 197 is discussed and deliberated. For further information, please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne at 410-767-0504, or [Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov](mailto:Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov).