

BILL: House Bill 1257
TITLE: Public Schools - Restorative Practice Schools - Establishment
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
DATE: February 28, 2024
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports the intent of this legislation to advance the statewide efforts to support restorative practices in public schools. MABE agrees that more resources should be invested to assist local school systems in providing training on, and implementation and evaluation of, restorative approaches that build and sustain positive learning communities.

MABE agrees that restorative approaches should play an integral role in the administration of Maryland's public schools. Such proactive practices, implemented following appropriate professional development and training of all staff, can make significant improvements in school climate and the learning conditions for all students to learn. However, MABE believes that the comprehensive professional development and staffing provisions of House Bill 1257 are overly ambitious and wholly unfunded at the local level. Therefore, MABE respectfully requests that the bill be transformed into a workgroup to develop recommendations to phase-in the expansion of restorative practices, including the designation of restorative practice schools, and the various funding and policy issues raised in the bill.

Maryland school systems are committed to each and all of their students becoming college and career ready and ensuring that the appropriate use of school discipline furthers that goal. Following several years of deliberations, the State Board of Education adopted new regulations in 2014 to dramatically reform the ways in which teachers, principals, and superintendents may suspend or expel students, and define the educational and behavioral supports to be provided to students in disciplinary situations. Therefore, MABE adopted the position of supporting the State Board's initiative to require local boards of education to reform their student discipline policies to:

- Prohibit "zero tolerance" policies;
- Reflect a philosophy that fosters positive behavior;
- Provide continuous education services to all suspended and expelled students; and
- Hold school systems accountable for reducing and eliminating disproportionate impacts of student discipline policies on minority students.

Legislation enacted in 2019 requires local boards of education to revise local board policies related to student discipline to provide for restorative practices. This law defines "restorative approaches" as a relationship-focused student discipline model that (1) is preventative and proactive; (2) emphasizes building strong relationships and setting clear behavioral expectations that contribute to the school community well-being; (3) in response to behavior that violates clear behavioral expectations, focuses on accountability for any harm done by the problem behavior; and (4) addresses ways to repair the relationships affected by the problem behavior with the voluntary participation of an individual who was harmed.

For the reasons outlined above, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 1257 if converted through amendments to establish a workgroup to develop funding and policy recommendations.