**OVERVIEW:**
Through the strategic call to action, *Learning and Leading with Equity: The Fierce Urgency of Now*, every student will embrace diversity, and possess the skills, knowledge, and confidence to lead a successful life and positively influence the larger community. The mission of HCPSS in executing this vision is to ensure academic success and social-emotional well-being for each student in an equitable and nurturing environment while closing opportunity gaps. To be truly effective at making this vision a reality, every educator in HCPSS must be committed to providing a caring, supportive, and nurturing learning environment with high expectations for every student. The clearest pathway toward achieving success with this bold call to action is through Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice emphasizes building relationships. When there is a need to repair harm caused by conflict and wrongdoing, restorative justice provides an opportunity for everyone impacted by an incident to come together to address their feelings and needs, and reach a resolution that heals and restores those relationships.

**RECOMMENDATION/FUTURE DIRECTION:**
The Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will work with system chiefs and school leaders to begin implementation of restorative justice throughout the district.
Overview
Through the strategic call to action, Learning and Leading with Equity: The Fierce Urgency of Now, every student will embrace diversity, and possess the skills, knowledge, and confidence to lead a successful life and positively influence the larger community. The mission of the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) in executing this vision is to ensure academic success and social-emotional well-being for each student in an equitable and nurturing environment while closing opportunity gaps. To be truly effective at making this vision a reality, every educator in HCPSS must be committed to providing a caring, supportive, and nurturing learning environment with high expectations for every student (HCPSS, 2017). The clearest pathway toward achieving success with this bold call to action is through Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice emphasizes building relationships. When there is a need to repair harm caused by conflict and wrongdoing, restorative justice provides an opportunity for everyone impacted by an incident to come together to address their feelings and needs, and reach a resolution that heals and restores those relationships (CJYI & PBMR, 2017).

Restorative Justice in schools began as an alternative to punitive discipline practices, but Restorative Justice is much more than just a response to zero tolerance policies and practices -- it is a philosophy and a culture shift. It emphasizes developing trust while listening to, valuing, and honoring others. Restorative Justice builds community in a meaningful way through healthy relationships that are nurtured through respectful communication and shared power that allows for individual and collective needs to be met (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Many times, the terms Restorative Justice and restorative practices are used interchangeably; however, they are different. Restorative Justice influences the practices we use to build healthy relationships between students, staff, and others within the school community (CJYI and PBMR, 2017), (DSBRPP, 2017). To be effective and sustainable, restorative practices must be rooted in Restorative Justice. These practices support students’ healthy social and emotional development; create spaces for difficult conversations, deep emotions and healing; shift focus from intervention to prevention of disciplinary infractions; and shift the paradigm from punitive to restorative disciplinary practices. Examples of restorative practices include circles, peer jury, restorative chats, restorative conferencing, family group conferencing, and mediation (CJYI and PBMR, 2017), (DSBRPP, 2017).

HCPSS has established a goal to implement Restorative Justice in an effective manner to ensure that educators are having a positive impact on students, staff, and families by cultivating strong relationships throughout all school communities. Implementing Restorative Justice successfully requires grounding practices in the underlining philosophy and making sure there is a focus on community, accountability in training, and consistency of practice throughout the school system (Advancement Project & NEA, 2017).

HCPSS has engaged in some form of restorative work since 2012, when Homewood Center began using restorative practices in collaboration with volunteers from the Mediation and Conflict Resolution Center. This year 34 schools have partially implemented the practices;
however, there is a need to shift thinking from practice to philosophy in order to create a restorative culture in HCPSS. To be effective in meeting the academic, social-emotional, and physical needs of students and staff, HCPSS must operate restoratively through polices, practices, procedures, and actions.

Why Restorative Justice?
Restorative Justice emboldens educators to be present at all times and allows for attention to needs as they arise. It increases the ability to be “dynamic rather than static in responses” and proactive instead of reactive to challenges. Restorative Justice provides opportunities for people to “express themselves—their strengths, assets, responsibilities, and also, their vulnerability” (ASCHSC, 2011) and is grounded in connections, community building, healing, shared values, and ancient teachings (Pranis, 2005).

There are “three interconnected components of Restorative Justice:
- Creating just and equitable learning environments
- Nurturing healthy relationships
- Repairing harm and transforming conflict

These components are based in the belief that people are worthy and relational and rooted in the values of respect, dignity, and mutual concern; therefore, Restorative Justice in education is facilitating learning communities that nurture the capacity of people to engage with one another and their environment in a manner that supports and respects the inherent dignity and worth of all” (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). At its core, Restorative Justice is about building community through relationships and nurturing those relationships in a healthy manner. A healthy relationship means that the power dynamic shifts from a “power over” frame to a “power with” frame. This allows all individuals to be honored and valued, thus ushering in acceptance and belonging (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Current Restorative Work in HCPSS
Two surveys were administered within the district to assess current practices. All HCPSS principals received a survey as did staff at the 34 schools currently undergoing restorative work. Seventy-three principals and 353 staff members completed the surveys, which examined training, implementation, processes, practices, and data.

There are several conclusions from the surveys:
- Current practices are not aligned with one another or consistent. This inconsistency has led to mixed feelings from administrators and staff on the effectiveness of restorative work.
- Students are the largest participants in Restorative Justice in HCPSS, with limited participation by adults. A culture and climate shift within the school community begins with the adults, so staff participation in Restorative Justice is essential.
- There is some confusion around language. For example, respondents were not clear as to whether community building circles were restorative circles. Community building is restorative, and although the purpose is not to repair or restore relationships, community building is designed to build relationships, which is the foundation of Restorative Justice.
There can be no repair nor restoration of relationships if there is no relationship in the first place.

Circles
According to the survey data, 86 percent of respondents indicated they use circles in their classes or school building. Because circles are the most widely used practice in HCPSS, it is necessary to expound on the practice of circle keeping.

Circles are the most comprehensive restorative practice. Types of restorative circles include celebration, learning, community building, dialogue, healing, support/understanding, decision-making, reintegration, conflict, and sentencing. Circles draw directly from the tradition and practices common among indigenous communities throughout the world. Circles engage people on a personal level, connect people in deep and personal places, and therefore contribute to personal development (Pranis, 2005). Circle keepers (those trained to keep circles) must understand the importance of including community in the process as well as the importance of human dignity, mutual concern, and respect (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

In order for a circle to be considered restorative, there must be intentional structural elements involved in the process. These processes not only honor the indigenous foundation of the practice but also creates a space where participants are able to be their most authentic self. These elements include:
- ceremony (opening and closing);
- no barriers (such as desk, tables);
- centerpiece;
- talking piece (something meaningful to the individual and passed - not tossed or thrown, sequentially to the left to honor the indigenous practice);
- check-ins and check-outs;
- creating and coming to consensus on shared values;
- creating and coming to consensus on guidelines based on the circle’s values (different from norms which are often provided by a facilitator and not generated by participants);
- questions or topics for discussion;
- consensus decision-making;
- keeper (not a facilitator or leader); and
- focus on relationships (Boytes-Watson & Pranis, 2015).

Prior to keeping a circle, individuals must be trained and versed in all of a circle’s elements. Not all trainings are equal, and those interested in becoming circle keepers should do their due diligence in researching trainings prior to attending to ascertain if the elements above are part of the training. If all of the listed elements are not included, the training does not meet the level of reliability needed to be effective.

Other Types of Restorative Practices
Relational practices: Relational practices are daily behaviors that focus on building relationships between students, staff, and families. This could be a daily check-in and check-out to ascertain how people are entering and leaving a space and are good gauges on how people
relate to one another. Relational practices help to strengthen relationships, build social/emotional intelligence, and create safe, healthy learning environments (ACSHSC, 2011).

**Restorative routines:** Restorative routines are daily actions that compliment a restorative climate and culture. They encompass a system of creating classroom values, adhering to them, discussing them, questioning them, and reviewing them together (ACSHSC, 2011).

**Peer mediation:** Peer mediation involves students neutral to a conflict who act as mediators to develop a mutual resolution to conflicts involving other students. Students are trained in the processes of conflict resolution, mediation, and restorative dialogues. The hope is peer mediators can help resolve conflicts before they become harmful (ACSHSC, 2011).

**Restorative conversations:** Restorative conversations are informal dialogues using restorative language to resolve conflict (ACSHSC, 2011) (Wachtel, 2014). They typically involve using restorative questions like:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who do you think has been affected by what you did? In what way?
- What do you need to make things right?
- How can we make sure this doesn’t happen again? (IBARJ, n.d.) (Wachtel, 2014)

**Implementation Performance Measures**

Once implementation begins there are several standards to assess the effectiveness of implementation. At the end of year one, the following benchmarks should be met:

- There is a common understanding of why Restorative Justice is being implemented.
- Foundational structures to support Restorative Justice are in place. This includes having a team of staff, with defined roles, in place to lead and sustain restorative work throughout the school.
- A method of collecting and analyzing data is developed.
- Staff, new and returning, are trained in Restorative Justice.
- Restorative language and culture have been established.
- Families and students are well-informed of the shift to Restorative Justice.
- Preventative measures, not just reactive measures, are being taken to improve school climate.

The focus for schools following year one and subsequent years should be on identifying benchmarks that were not met and strengthen those that were met or exceeded (DSBRPP, 2017).

**Integrating Restorative Justice in HCPSS**

Restorative Justice fulfills *Learning and Leading with Equity* by connecting with its commitments of value, achieve, connect, and empower; and many of its desired outcomes like equity, relationships, social-emotional learning, meaningful and rewarding employment, diversity, inclusion, trust, partnership, culture and climate, safe, responsive, and student centered (HCPSS, 2017).
Restorative Justice also connects with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is currently being implemented in 68 of our schools. PBIS is a framework for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum through defining, teaching, and acknowledging behavioral expectations. By reinforcing positive behaviors, schools find that instruction increases while office referrals and suspension decrease. In addition to PBIS, Restorative Justice connects with a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for students. MTSS focuses on the student’s academic and performance efforts and their social emotional learning needs. MTSS integrates these focuses through a system of interventions which aim to eliminate opportunity gaps among student groups (MSDE, 2016). When implemented effectively, Restorative Justice, PBIS, and MTSS create a supportive school climate.

Recommendations
To move HCPSS toward building a restorative culture and achieving its goal of having every school successfully and effectively implementing Restorative Justice, the following next steps are recommended:

- The Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion should monitor the implementation of Restorative Justice throughout the district.
- The Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion should begin working with school leaders on strategies to implement Restorative Justice in their school communities.
- Staff who are already trained in restorative practices should be retrained in order to ground their work in the philosophy of Restorative Justice.
- HCPSS should develop a training model to ensure practices within the district are consistent. Until this is developed, school leaders and staff should adhere to the guidelines set forth in this report.
- The Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion should develop a peer mediation program within HCPSS and assist schools with identifying practices other than circles that establish a restorative culture.

Conclusion
Imbedding work in Restorative Justice is not implementing a new program. Restorative Justice enhances collective work in a more deliberate and substantial way. If implemented with consistency and system wide, Restorative Justice can create and maintain positive schools cultures and climates, and, increase a sense of inclusivity for all students, staff, and families (ASCHSC, 2011).
Definitions

Dignity: Worth that cannot be substituted. People have dignity because the essence of who they are cannot be replaced.

Mutual concern: Much more than a common concern, mutual concern is reciprocal, interconnected caring.

Respect: To look again from the point of view of the other; to put one’s self in the other’s shoes and then respond.

Restorative justice: A philosophy that emphasizes building relationships. When there is a need to repair harm caused by conflict and wrongdoing, restorative justice provides an opportunity for everyone impacted by an incident to come together in a safe space to address their feelings and needs, and reach a resolution that heals and restores relationships.

Restorative practices: Build healthy relationships between students and school staff, as well as among adults within the school community; support students’ healthy social and emotional development; create safe spaces for difficult conversations, deep emotions and healing; shift the focus from intervention to prevention of disciplinary infractions; and shift the paradigm from punitive to restorative disciplinary practices that repair harm and reduce suspensions, expulsions, and arrests.
Works Cited


Community Justice for Youth Institute (CJYI) & Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR). (2017). Definitions of restorative justice and restorative practices created for Advancement Project and National Education Association for adoption. Chicago, IL.


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