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RESTORATIVE PRACTICES COMING TO ALL DISTRICT SCHOOLS

District resumes efforts to reduce student suspensions after interruption by COVID-19 lockdown

The goal is to have Restorative Practice Core Teams in every school by Nov. 9th

PATERSON – The district is renewing its efforts in establishing Restorative Practices as an alternative to disciplining students with out-of-school suspensions with [a new video](#) and the goal of establishing core teams of trained staff members in every school by the end of the first marking period, November 9th.

“I have never been in support of out-of-school suspension. That gives students another opportunity to get in trouble because it’s not structured. Restorative practices will help us decrease the number of out-of-school suspensions, although we know that some infractions require suspension,” said Superintendent of Schools Eileen F. Shafer. “More importantly, restorative practices will help students develop skills that will be of value for a life, including conflict resolution and maintaining good relationships with family members, friends, as well as colleagues and other people they meet later in life.”

Assistant Superintendent Cicely Warren pointed out that one of the principles of restorative practices is making sure that students are heard, respected, and valued. “If students know that they are valued and essential to their school communities and what happens at school day-to-day, they won’t want to miss a day of school,” Warren said.

“Schools that use Restorative Practices build strong communities of trust, respect, and nurture the entire child within every student,” said Assistant Superintendent David Cozart.

Executive Director of the Paterson Education Fund (PEF) Rosie Grant who, with Linda Reid of the PEF, introduced district officials to Restorative Practices, said that the use of the practices was particularly important during this time after the pandemic shutdown.

“Let’s think about healing and restoring and getting to a place where we’re all comfortable walking into the building, we all feel welcomed, and we have positive relationships,” said Grant. “And then we can focus on learning because we have the environment that is conducive to teaching and learning.”

At the heart of Restorative Practices is the use of the Restorative Circle. It’s a conversation held with students involved in a conflict or students who have violated the district’s Code of Conduct. Everyone is considered an equal in the circle, and everyone is afforded opportunities to speak. The goal is to build understanding among everyone in the circle of the root causes of the behaviors that led to the conflict or violation, make reparations when necessary, and develop ways to avoid those behaviors.

Prior to March 2021, Paterson Public Schools had made considerable progress in establishing restorative practices as the alternative to working with students who break the Code of Conduct with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Staff members were trained in restorative practice methods. A Peace Center where students can resolve conflicts or simply take a break opened at Eastside High School.

And then the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closing of all of the district's school buildings.

Now, with schools operating much closer to their pre-pandemic norms, Paterson Public Schools resumed its efforts to establish restorative practices in every school.

To reacquaint school leaders with the concepts, the district's Communication Department created a video, [*The Circle Unbroken*](#), which recounts how restorative practices were introduced to the district by Rosie Grant and Linda Reid of the Paterson Education Fund, a local nonprofit that advocates for Paterson students and families. Restorative practice principles are explained by Grant, as well as Superintendent Shafer, Assistant Superintendent Warren, Assistant Superintendent Cozart, and district Director of Climate and Culture Nicole Payne.

The video is currently being used by school principals during professional development sessions with their staff members to raise awareness of how restorative practices work and the benefits they can provide.

The next step will be for schools to form core restorative practices teams by the end of the first marking period, which is November 9th. Each team will have at least five members and will include an administrator, a guidance counselor or student assistance coordinator, and a teacher coordinator.

The purpose of the core teams is to hold restorative circles as schools' first response to students in conflict with one another or who have violated the Code of Conduct.

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