

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)



Public Hearing on
School Safety, Bill 25-234 – School Safety Enhancement Amendment Act of 2023, and Bill
25-420 – Conflict Resolution Education Amendment Act of 2023

Testimony of
Ricky A. Brown, Jr., Deputy Chief, School Security
Paige Hoffman, Chief, Office of School Improvement and Support
District of Columbia Public Schools

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Thursday, January 11, 2024
10:30 AM

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmembers, staff, and members of the public. I am Paige Hoffman, Chief of the Office of School Improvement and Support at the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Our office works with schools to promote whole-child practices, support diverse student needs, and increase staff effectiveness. I am joined today by my colleague, Ricky A. Brown, Jr., our

disruptive behavior, MTSS is a key tool that schools can use to develop an intervention aligned to the root cause of the behavior, and ultimately result in safer and more productive behavior.²

In partnership with Transcend, we recently launched our DCPS Becoming Pilot with 41 schools. Pilot schools like Johnson Middle School deeply trained their staff in the science of learning and development, including the impact of stress and adversity on the brain and the body. From the moment students arrive at the sidewalk in front of Johnson each morning, staff flood them with love and connection. Pilot schools have also launched a new check-in survey to keep a pulse on how students are feeling each week and month. This fall, Tier 4 and 5 infractions, the most serious incidents, are down 30% from last year.

resolution education program. The bill would also require DCPS to receive input from Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs) on the adequacy of resources for conflict resolution education at each school. We appreciate the Council's interest in this important topic and expend considerable time and resources supporting the development of students' conflict resolution skills. Having said that, we do not believe that legislation is necessary to improve outcomes for students related to conflict resolution.

DCPS believes that each child has the potential to be successful in school. DCPS staff proactively work to establish trust and relationships with students that are critical to leverage in times of conflict. Building on those relationships, DCPS emphasizes the use of practices that resolve conflicts without excluding students from school. These practices are often referred to as restorative practices. When we talk about restorative practices, we mean a group of actions intended to build community, manage conflict, and resolve tensions by repairing the harm caused by individual(s) toward another and restoring relationships.⁴

In the 2022 – 2023 school year, the Restorative Practices team trained 2,300 DCPS stakeholders in the Whole Child Framework, Restorative Practices, Bullying Prevention, and on other related topics. These training courses increased staff capacity to implement restorative practices as a proactive measure for strengthening relationships within classrooms, schools, and community. Finally, DCPS has codified the strategies that exemplify model restorative practice schools so that schools have clear standards of excellence.

And this year, we are seeing results. So far this school year, we have seen the recorded use of restorative practices in schools more than double, and now nearly 30% of all infractions have a restorative response. These practices can look like student-student mediations, staff-student mediations, restorative circles or conversations, reflections by students, or a re-entry circle. Restorative Practices often start with adults supporting students to talk through a conflict they are having with each other that could have otherwise resulted in something like a fight. As students see the value and develop skills, they often ask for mediations or restorative conversations to avoid escalated conflict, as we heard from a Principal a few weeks ago when, after a weekend fight in the neighborhood, students came in Monday morning asking for a mediation instead of further escalation.

⁴ For more information on DCPS' approach to using restorative practices, see the DCPS Safe and Positive Schools Policy at <https://dcps.dc.gov/node/1578396> and DCPS' Restorative Practices resource page at <https://dcps.dc.gov/page/restorative-practices>.

OSSE recently released draft Social and Emotional Learning standards for public comment, and our team participated in the standards writing group. These standards focus on skills that will help students develop an awareness of their emotions, manage stress, and use relationships to