

Reimagining School Safety and Student Well-being

Preliminary Report as of August 30, 2021

Background

On May 12, 2021, County Executive Marc Elrich announced the creation of the Reimagining School Safety and Student Well-Being (RSSSW) Committee. The Committee contains 32 stakeholders, including students; representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Montgomery County Department of Police, and Montgomery County Public Schools; and staff members from the Offices of the County Executive and County Council.

In order to more effectively address the responsibilities of the steering committee, three subcommittees were formed in June: Mental Health, Restorative Justice, and one focused on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed October 17, 2017, between Montgomery County Public Schools; Montgomery County Department of Police; Montgomery County Sheriff's Office; Rockville City Police Department; Gaithersburg City Police Department; Takoma Park Police Department; and the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office. Given the timeline dictated by the start of the 2021-2020 school year, a majority of the Reimagining School Safety and Student Wellbeing Steering Committee members and work efforts this summer focused on the MOU subcommittee and deadlines related to the reopening of school.

This preliminary report outlines the RSSSW Committee areas of focus, initial recommendations, timelines and actions taken to date.

Recommendations as of August 30, 2021

Mental Health Subcommittee

Areas of focus for the Mental Health Subcommittee identified by the entire Reimagining School Safety and Student Wellbeing committee:

1. Look at root causes of behavior (from a Mental Health vs delinquency lens) with funding for mental health supports rather than police response as a solution,
2. Create systems of support to respond to student mental health crises in school, and
3. Assess if there are sufficient mental health professionals available to students for proactive engagement

Recommendations to date:

1. Look at root causes of behavior (from a Mental Health vs delinquency lens) with funding for mental health supports rather than police response as a solution (*referred to Restorative Justice (RJ) subcommittee as it speaks to a shift in school culture that can be addressed through RJ training*)
2. Create/enhance systems of support to respond to student mental health crises in school
 - a. Increase training for all MCPS staff on verbal de-escalation skills and increase the number of staff in each school building trained in all levels of de-escalation (verbal and physical) in an effort to reduce the number/frequency of crisis incidents in the school
 - i. Invest in “train the trainer” model so that MCPS employees can provide the de-escalation training to school staff, reducing the cost of hiring outside trainers
 - b. Create a comprehensive and integrated crisis intervention decision tree and intervention guidelines
 - i. Define types of crises, including mental health crises, suicidal ideation, aggression, and physical threat, to increase connection of potential underlying mental health issues in acting out behavior
 - ii. Clearly define the role of those intervening in the crisis including school personnel, such as administrators, counselors, teachers, school security, and external support systems, such as the Crisis Center, the Mobile Crisis Response Team, and on-site contracted mental health professionals
 - c. Support School Wellbeing Teams’ (SWBT) effectiveness in addressing and preventing crises by designating or funding a SWBT leader who has knowledge of available resources, de-escalation and intervention strategies, and who has sufficient time to dedicate to these responsibilities
3. Assess if there are sufficient mental health professionals available to students for proactive engagement
 - a. Increase School Counselors’ availability to support student’s social/emotional needs
 - i. Complete a job class study assessing current job responsibilities
 1. Explore separation of academic counseling and social/emotional counseling duties
 - ii. Assess effectiveness of 1:250 counselor to student ratio in meeting the social/emotional needs of students, factoring available mental health supports at the school and level of need
 1. Hire more school counselors to lower the student/counselor ratio
 - b. Explore use of/increase in mental health navigators/behavioral health resource specialists to link students/families with available mental health providers, maximizing use of existing resources

The timeline for implementation of these initial Mental Health recommendations is outlined below, and presumes that more specific operational metrics will be added in phase two of this work as the school year begins. Subject matter experts from MCPS in the arena of student mental health supports will have the opportunity to contribute to this subcommittee in phase two as many were 10 month employees with limited availability over the summer. The Mental Health and Restorative Justice subcommittees chairs have met and plan for the subcommittees to work together more closely moving forward in order to expand cross-sector participation in both and further align or integrate recommendations wherever possible.

Immediate Recommendation	Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a comprehensive and integrated crisis intervention decision tree and intervention guidelines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Define types of crises ○ Clearly define the role of those intervening in the crisis ○ Update and integrate existing policies and procedures ● Support School Wellbeing Teams’ (SWBT) effectiveness in addressing and preventing crises by designating or funding a SWBT leader who has knowledge of available resources, de-escalation and intervention strategies, and who has sufficient time to dedicate to these responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaboration with MCPS, Crisis Center, DHHS ● Funding for additional staff to run SWBT teams or remove staff responsibilities to increase ability to focus on SWBT

Recommendations Within 6 months	Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess effectiveness of 1:250 counselor to student ratio in meeting the social/emotional needs of students, factoring available mental health supports at the school and level of need ● Invest in “train the trainer” model so that MCPS employees can provide the de-escalation training to school staff (verbal to all staff and more extensive training to limited number of staff), reducing the cost of hiring outside trainers ● Explore use of/increase in mental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Input from MCPS, students, parents, MCCPTA, on site behavioral health providers ● MCPS staff who can be designated as trainers ● Cost to train MCPS trainers on de-escalation model

health navigators/behavioral health resource specialists to link students/families with available mental health providers, maximizing use of existing resources	
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Recommendations Within 1 Year	Funding Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase School Counselors' availability to support student's social/emotional needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete a job class study assessing current job responsibilities ○ Explore separation of academic counseling and social/emotional counseling duties ○ Hire more school counselors to lower the student/counselor ratio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MCPS OHR staff time to complete a job class study ● Funding for additional school counselors

Restorative Justice Subcommittee

Recommendations:

1. A rewrite of the MCPS Student Code of Conduct to elevate the full continuum of restorative practices that outline specific restorative practices for each level within the Code of Conduct
2. Hire a full-time, salaried, fully-released Restorative Justice (RJ) lead teacher at every school
 - a. Actualize a monthly RJ Lead Teacher Professional Learning Community (PLC) to encompass:
 - i. Professional Learning for the RJ Lead Teachers self-work
 - ii. Professional Learning for RJ Lead Teachers to take back to their respective schools
 - iii. Regular, consistent support provided to RJ Lead Teachers and schools throughout the year by the Restorative Justice Unit
3. A Restorative Justice Team at every school, led by the Restorative Justice Lead Teacher, with MCPS staff receiving the after-school stipend to engage in the development and implementation of monitoring and accountability models to actualize a restorative school.

- a. The team members would include, administrator(s), caregivers, students, teachers, school counselor(s), pupil personnel worker(s), and school security personnel (for middle and high school)
 - b. Monitoring and accountability tools would include the following to elevate disparities among student populations and engage in professional learning to dismantle the disparities elevated:
 - i. Student and Family voice data
 - ii. Referral data
 - iii. Suspension/Expulsion data
 - iv. Arrest data
4. Cluster trainings with Office of Teaching, Learning, and Schools – School Support and Improvement (OTLS-SSI) Directors, Administrators, Community Engagement Officers (CEOs), School Security Personnel, RJ Lead Teachers, and RJ team members to encompass:
- a. The full continuum of restorative practices, emphasizing the preventative before the responsive side of the continuum
 - b. Develop shared understanding in approaches
 - c. Seek to dismantle discrepancies within and across clusters as well as the school district
 - d. Unpacking the MOU between MCPS and MCPD
 - e. Scenario walkthroughs through a restorative lens
 - f. Scenarios that outline when to contact CEO
 - g. Mediation scenarios

Additionally, we elevate the listed items below to coincide with the funding asks outlined in the table below:

- Fully staffing the Restorative Justice Unit with 6 instructional specialists to support the implementation of Restorative Justice across the school district
- Funding to support the implementation and data analysis of Restorative Justice across the district for 10 years to allow for the full cycle of change and implementation theory to actualize
- Funding stipends and substitutes for all MCPS staff to stay within intentional and impactful cycles of professional learning and implementation

Immediate Recommendation	Human Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A rewrite of the MCPS Student Code of Conduct to elevate the full continuum of restorative practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outline specific restorative practices for each level within 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaboration with MSDE, MCPS cross-office collaboration led by the MCPS Restorative Justice Unit, MCPS Office of the General Council

<p>the Code of Conduct</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RJ Team supports the gradual and intentional shift from punitive to restorative measures within schools 	
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Recommendations Within 6 months	Funding Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify a Restorative Justice lead teacher at every school, receiving the after-school stipend to engage in work before and after the duty day ● RJ Team created at every school, led by the RJ Lead Teacher made up of the following members, with MCPS staff receiving the after-school stipend to engage in work before and after the duty day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Administrator(s) ○ Caregivers ○ Teachers ○ Students ○ School Security Personnel (for middle and high schools) ○ School Counselor(s) and/or PPW ● Monthly RJ Lead Teacher PLC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Professional Learning for RJ Lead Teachers themselves ○ Professional Learning to take back to their respective schools ○ RJ Unit provides regular, consistent support to schools throughout the year ● RJ Team trained on the full continuum of preventative restorative practices ● Training with administrators, CEOs, School Security, RJ Lead Teacher, and additional RJ team members to envelop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MOU ○ Scenario walkthroughs through a restorative lens ○ Scenarios that outline when to contact CEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MCPS after duty day stipend amount ● Stipend and/or substitute funding for RJ Lead teachers and MCEA and SEIU RJ Team members

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mediation scenarios ● Cluster trainings with OTLS-SSI Directors, Administrators, CEOs, School Security Personnel, RJ Lead Teachers, and RJ team members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on the why of the full continuum of restorative practices ○ Develop shared understanding in approaches ○ Seek to dismantle discrepancies within and across clusters as well as the school district 	
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Recommendations Within 1 Year	Funding Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify a Restorative Justice lead teacher with the maximum stipend allowable at every school ● RJ Team created at every school, led by the RJ Lead Teacher made up of the following members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Administrator(s) ○ Caregivers ○ Teachers ○ Students ○ School Security Personnel (for middle and high schools) ○ School Counselor(s) and/or PPW ● Monthly RJ Lead Teacher PLC led MCPS RJ Unit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Professional Learning for RJ Lead Teachers themselves ○ Professional Learning to take back to their respective schools ○ RJ Unit provides regular, consistent support to schools throughout the year ● <u>Monitoring and accountability models implemented to actualize a restorative school district</u> ● School RJ Team trained on the full continuum of preventative restorative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maximum Resource Teacher stipend amount ● Funding for RJ Lead teachers to receive the maximum resource teacher stipend amount ● Stipend and/or substitute funding for RJ Lead teachers and MCEA and SEIU RJ Team members

<p>practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training with administrators, CEOs, School Security, RJ Lead Teacher, and additional RJ team members to envelop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MOU ○ Scenario walkthroughs through a restorative lens ○ Scenarios that outline when to contact CEO ○ Mediation scenarios ● Cluster trainings with OTLS-SSI Directors, Administrators, CEOs, School Security Personnel, RJ Lead Teachers, and RJ team members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on the why of the full continuum of restorative practices ○ Develop shared understanding in approaches ○ Seek to dismantle discrepancies within and across clusters as well as the school district ● RJ School teams develop the RJ professional learning and implementation plan (sample) ● Actualize the implementation cycle with specific monitoring tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ kid/caregiver voice data ○ Referral data ○ Suspension/Expulsion data ○ Arrest data ○ Analyze monitoring tools for disparities within data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Professional learning to dismantle disparities that have been elevated 	
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Recommendations Within 2 Years	Funding Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify a full-time, salaried, fully released Restorative Justice lead teacher at every school ● Monitoring and accountability models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding for a full-time, fully released RJ Lead Teacher at every school

implemented to actualize a restorative school district

- Specific outlining of restorative vs punitive measures within the MCPS Student Code of Conduct
 - RJ Team supports the gradual and intentional shift from punitive to restorative measures within schools
- Cluster trainings with OTLS-SSI Directors, Administrators, CEOs, School Security Personnel, RJ Lead Teachers, and RJ team members
 - Focus on the why of the full continuum of restorative practices
 - Develop shared understanding in approaches
 - Seek to dismantle discrepancies within and across clusters as well as the school district
- RJ School teams refine the RJ professional learning and implementation plan
- Analyze monitoring tools for disparities within data
 - Professional learning to dismantle disparities that have been elevated and implemented
- Monthly RJ Lead Teacher PLC led MCPS RJ Unit
 - Professional Learning for RJ Lead Teachers themselves
 - Professional Learning to take back to their respective schools
 - RJ Unit provides regular, consistent support to schools throughout the year

MOU Subcommittee

The MOU Subcommittee is committed to undertaking a comprehensive review and revision of the current MOU, beginning in September 2021 and concluding by December 2021. The subcommittee identified the following topics to be included in his comprehensive review:

- All components of the current MOU
- Incorporation of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services into a new MOU
- Focus on supporting students vs. only police responses
- Mobile crisis response
- Restorative justice
- Data collection and accountability
- Training for MCPS administrators and MCPD
- County community outreach workers
- Specific situations where there should be mental health professionals to respond vs. police

The subcommittee identified the following stakeholders be included in his comprehensive review:

- Students, including SGA representatives
- Educators
- Parents, including PTA representatives
- County council staff
- Principals
- DHHS
- Mental health professionals
- MCPD & municipal law enforcement agencies
- Community stakeholders
- State's attorney's office

In an effort to take some steps to reduce student and police interactions for the start of the 2021-22 school year, and prior to the comprehensive review and revision of the current MOU, the subcommittee extensively reviewed two sections of the current MOU: the duties of school resource officers (pages 1-3) and the lists of critical incidents in which schools are required to contact the police (pages 8-9). Based on these recommendations, it is expected that a new, signed MOU will be released by early September.

MCPD announced in late August that SROs will now be called community engagement officers (CEOs). The subcommittee recommends that they not be stationed in school buildings or on school grounds, and that school requests for police service not be made directly to the CEOs. (Instead, schools would call 911 for emergencies and 301-279-8000 for non-emergencies.)

On pages 8-9 of the current MOU, there are lists of critical incidents “where police shall take the lead in investigating” and “where police may take the lead in investigating depending on the circumstances. The subcommittee would like to review and revise this language around critical incidents in the comprehensive review and revision of the MOU beginning in September. However, working within the current framework, the subcommittee made the recommendations below. The police would still be contacted when these incidents occur.

Recommendations (Part 1): In the list of critical incidents on page 8 of the MOU, the subcommittee recommends moving the following incidents from “critical incident where police shall take the lead in investigating” to “critical incident where police may take the lead in investigating depending on the circumstances”:

- Arson (willful and maliciously set fire) or verbal or written threat of arson
- Knowingly making false reports about the location or detonation of a destructive device
- Distribution or manufacture of a controlled dangerous substance

Recommendations (Part 2): The subcommittee also recommended that the following incidents (pages 8-9) move from “critical incident where police shall take the lead in investigating” to “critical incident where police may take the lead in investigating depending on the circumstances.” However, in order to provide time for further legal review, these recommendations have been deferred to the comprehensive review/revision of the MOU:

- Hate crime (harassing a person or damaging property of a person because of their race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or national origin)
- Gang related incident/crime

Recommendations (Part 3): In the section of the MOU (page 9) that lists “critical incidents where police may take the lead in investigating depending on the circumstances,” the subcommittee recommends the following:

- “Physical attack on another that requires medical attention outside the health room”: Change to “In the event of a 911 call regarding a physical attack on another that requires medical attention outside the health room.
- “Theft (any single incident or series of incidents committed by the same perpetrator where the value of stolen property is \$500 or more)”: Change \$500 to \$1500.
- Possession of a marijuana: Police will only confiscate the substance.

Next Steps

Reimagining School Safety and Student Well-Being (RSSSW) Committee work, through its subcommittees, will continue to focus on these recommendations regarding supports for students and will expand to include appropriate stakeholders as we move forward. Members of the various subcommittees will work jointly to finalize recommendations that overlap and we will engage the members of the County Council’s Student Wellbeing Advisory Committee as our recommendations also have significant overlap. The next report of recommendations and implementation steps is scheduled for December 31, 2021. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of the co-chairs.

Reimagining School Safety and Student Well-Being (RSSSW) Committee Co-Chairs

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