

**The University of Maryland School of Social Work
Social Work Community Outreach Service (SWCOS)
The Positive Center**

**Interim Report
July 1, 2022- December 31, 2022**

Since July 2022, the PSC has provided 133 sessions or 215 hours of technical assistance, training, and coaching for Baltimore City partner schools. This represents a roughly 30% increase over last year and is primarily the result of the PSC's increased focus on technical assistance for school culture team leads and staff, as well as a significant increase in the number of circle and culture walk observations we have been able to provide.

Leader Coaching and Implementation Support

So far this year, all schools have participated in at least one leader coaching session. Seventy percent have completed at least two, and seven schools have completed at least three coaching rounds. This year, the PSC is piloting an increased focus on directly supporting the individuals and teams implementing culture transformation efforts in addition to school leaders. We are meeting bi-weekly or monthly with the culture teams for seven schools, collaborating with the team leads to plan for the meetings, support with data tracking and evaluation, and assist staff with implementation. Teams have a variety of focuses including restorative practices implementation, student and adult social-emotional learning (SEL), Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), staff equity work, and staff recognition and adult relationships. The new Baltimore City culture and climate plans were a major challenge for many partner schools. In August and September, the PSC worked with multiple school climate leads to draft plans that reflected their school's current strengths and staff priorities, and community interests. We also helped to create documents to support implementation and processes to get full-staff buy-in.

Staff Training

So far this year, the PSC has provided 16 full-staff training for school teams, the majority of which occurred over the summer and during back-to-school professional development (PD). This is fewer professional development sessions compared with past years and is largely in response to changing City Schools' professional development calendars, and the high level of burnout among school staff. Ninety-six percent of staff participants reported that the professional development sessions caused them to examine their thinking and practices, and 78% strongly agreed. Some of the items that staff shared as meaningful takeaways from training include:

- How to better implement restorative strategies such as proactive circles and restorative questions
- The importance and strategies for regular self-reflection and self-awareness
- Strategies to use open-ended questions and to listen when resolving conflict
- Effective communication tools to improve relationship skills
- The importance of building proactive relationship-building strategies into school processes
- Explicitly sharing the purpose of circles and relationship-building to build positive school culture through circles
- The importance of involving student voice in the school setting
- Strategies to support new staff who are just beginning to use restorative circles

- Prioritizing adult-to-adult relationships, not just adult-to-student relationships
- Reflecting on personal and secondary trauma, and how this impacts students and the school community
- Using the social discipline window as a self-assessment tool to build more restorative or “with” relationships
- To become more responsive to individual and community trauma
- Using restorative strategies to set classroom norms, procedures, and expectations

During the December Culture Team meeting, a school climate team leader shared that her goal for the new year is to refocus on professional development. She shared that it is hard to schedule professional development when you are tired, and your team is tired. This semester they have opted to provide staff work-time. Her takeaway was that her staff needs to invest time in culture and climate professional development because it is the only way to spend less time responding to student behaviors moving forward. Her observation is consistent with our experience this year and will be our major push with school leaders during the second half of the school year. We hope a more consistent district-wide PD calendar this spring will support this goal.

School Culture and Circle Observations

The PSC has conducted 21 circle and culture walks (as compared to last year’s 17 total). We have had 17 out of our 23 schools participate in at least one observation walk and debrief cycle. Many schools have already completed a circle and more general culture walk. Seventy-five percent of schools are currently holding proactive circles multiple times a week. All schools participate in proactive circles at least occasionally, and 40% of schools use circles at least daily as a fundamental structure of their day. Frequent areas of growth for school partners include focusing on planning and structuring multiple rounds of circle questions, increasing opportunities for adults to circle, and emphasizing language around the purpose of circles and norm-setting while introducing daily circles. Areas of growth for school culture and climate include focusing on developing student voice and portraying community identity to encourage relationships between students, staff, and the community. Another focus is the growth of restorative language, or virtues language, by teachers and staff.

The district culture walk will not be launched until January 2023, and there is currently no broadly implemented circle walk tool. City Schools hopes to have all schools complete at least one culture walk by June 2023. The PSC plans to conduct between three and five culture/circle walks by the end of the current school year. We also have had two Instructional Leadership Executive Directors (ILEDs) request school culture walk data from us. We are working with school leaders to ensure that it remains a collaborative learning document rather than a punitive or compliance-driven one.

Tools and Resources Equip Staff

The PSC has created and distributed a variety of tools and resources for school and community partners. Our most frequently requested tool remains the monthly circle prompt calendars and lists. We frequently observe the tools being used in classrooms and have received positive feedback from school leaders and staff. Beginning in November 2022, we have developed each month a menu of SEL activities aligned to one of the CASEL competencies. The district provides extensive resources, but the volume and varying quality has been overwhelming for school staff, and school leaders have requested to curate a separate menu. In staff feedback surveys, 95% of school partners report that the PSC provides tools and other resources to further their learning.

The PSC has also further refined the debrief tool and process to provide immediate, timely, and actionable feedback for principals and staff following each walk within two business days. Additionally, our staff and members of the school staff participating in observations, leave comment cards for every

staff observed identifying multiple strengths, and one or two areas of growth or questions to consider. Several schools have begun to use our comment cards for in-house observations and feedback.

Collective Training and Workshops

The PSC hosted its first in-person Summer Institute since 2019. All partner schools attended, including school principals and leaders for the first morning, and the remaining day and a half focused on equipping school culture leaders with an overview and implementation strategies for their school staff. The focus on school culture leaders continued with a mid-year meeting for the culture teams. They will meet again around the end of the third quarter. We will meet with all principals as a group in February, after the end of the first semester and the end of the school year.

To meet the needs of school and community partners, the PSC has provided group Introduction to Restorative Practices and Using Circles Effectively for new staff. We are in the process of scheduling a Restorative Conferencing and responsive strategies train-the-trainer in early winter 2023. Many of our partner schools have been making great strides in using restorative strategies to proactively develop relationships. This train-the-trainer follows the natural next step as schools continue to develop their restorative capacity.

The PSC has also continued its free, virtual workshop series. We have provided a mini-series in October and December. Each of the five sessions has had between 15 and 35 attendees from all over the nation. This platform has provided a new and valuable opportunity to connect with other educators, social workers, and youth advocates doing this work throughout the country. This year, the PSC has restructured the format of the workshops so that they could be recorded and distributed with the supporting resources to PSC staff, school partners, individuals connecting with the PSC through social media and our mailing list, and other community members who were unable to attend in person. We have also developed a five-part series of workshops designed for student families explaining and exploring restorative practices, virtues language, and social-emotional learning. We are piloting this project with The Belair-Edison School (Elementary Grades) this semester and will be expanding to several of our community schools this year.

Community Supports

In addition to supporting our Baltimore City partner schools, the PSC supports the broader Baltimore, Maryland, and national school and youth-services community. The PSC provides paid training for a variety of youth-services organizations. This fall, the PSC has provided training and support for City Schools including the Whole Child Services and Supports office and the Health and Safety Coordinators. We have also provided training for MOST, Project Pneuma, the University of Maryland Police Department's PAL program, Teachers Democracy Project, Baltimore AROS, and The Y in Central Maryland. The PSC was asked by the Fund for Educational Excellence and the Heart of the Schools to support strategic planning and implementation of school staff break room renovations, which they hope to scale to more broadly support Baltimore City schools in the coming years.

The PSC has presented at multiple conferences including the Maryland Cultural Proficiency Conference and the National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference. We are looking forward to presenting at multiple community schools and SEL conferences in the spring and continuing to work on the PSC's own national Restorative Approaches conference in 2024.

The PSC has also continued to invest in building relationships and collaboration among Baltimore and Maryland educational organizations and policymakers. The PSC's director continues to chair the Baltimore School Climate Collaborative (BSCC). This fall, the BSCC has provided feedback for several new or revised City Schools policies, has discussed the Accountability and Implementation Board's (AIB) Implementation Plan for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and highlighted the work of multiple non-

profits and organizations. In the spring, the BSCC will have an increased focus on new initiatives coming from various departments within the Baltimore City government.

The PSC is currently serving as the chair of the Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD), which was organized to provide testimony to ensure that restorative approaches were reflected in the AIB's final Implementation Plan. The PSC also represented CRSD and BSCC this fall in an MSDE workgroup to revise their new restraint and seclusion policy that will be released in winter 2023.

Implementation Challenges

Evolving Programming to Meet Shifting District Needs

The PSC's greatest asset is that we are able to provide non-evaluative, restorative support to schools, separate from the work of the district. Collaborating with schools in spite of the district's changing schedules, new deliverables, and shifting priorities is our greatest challenge. This fall there were more limited school-based professional development days, compared with past years. Many of these changes have been at the last minute. As a result, we have had to frequently cancel or reschedule training and meetings with staff, and have had fewer full-staff training than in past years. We have shifted to focus more on school-based teams, but progress has been slowed as a result of more limited access to full-staff teams. The new district-required climate plans have been another source of frustration for schools that the PSC has had to work through.

High Levels of Community Violence

Many of our schools have been working to implement proactive relationship-building while simultaneously responding to significant community and school violence this fall. Being able to respond to community harm and trauma is a major reason for investing in restorative approaches. Supporting schools in responding to emergent needs, while simultaneously building safe, restorative communities has been challenging. PSC staff have facilitated multiple restorative conferences, as well as providing support for school staff, working with Baltimore-based restorative partners. We have also supported the district with non-partner schools, like Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School because there is a city-wide shortage of support for restorative approaches. The PSC is currently working with city and state policymakers and advocates to increase resources, training, and accountability for restorative approaches before a responsive intervention following violence is needed.

Maximizing PSC Staff Time and Supports

Over the last year, the PSC has become even more strategic in the use of PSC staff time, our most valuable resource. The PSC has piloted bi-weekly or monthly technical assistance sessions with school culture and climate teams, as well as circle and school culture observations. We have also increased our use of less formal in-person visits with a variety of school leaders such as grade-band administrators, restorative and wholeness leads, related services providers, and assistant principals. While effective, they require a significant investment of time as well as non-productive travel time.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the PSC invested significant time and research in modifying our training offerings and coaching strategies so that they would be compelling and accessible in the virtual setting. Even as schools reopened, we have continued to use virtual platforms to provide more frequent and flexible support for schools and groups of district-wide staff. Through relationship building, we have learned which school leaders and teams can meet virtually, and which teams are more successful working together in person. We have been experimenting with asynchronous, recorded training modules created through our workshop series, and we look forward to seeing how these can increase staff time to better support families, climate leads, and community partners.

Organizational Growth

Since August 2021, the PSC's staff nearly tripled in size through the incorporation of the University of Maryland School of Social Work's Promise Heights program. This growth has allowed the PSC to have a more significant presence and personal relationships with five schools in the form of Community Schools staff, attendance support, parent leaders, and college and career staff. This season of growth created new opportunities for us to hire additional staff, making us even less reliant on contracted coaches and trainers, and to deepen and broaden our expertise. As part of these new hires, the PSC took the opportunity to restructure. The PSC has hired a new Associate Director, Nikomar Mosley, who most recently served as a City Schools elementary school principal. He is currently completing his dissertation on the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in urban districts. The PSC is also continually looking for new funding, creative partnerships, and contracted trainers to broaden our capacity and areas of expertise. The PSC is also focusing on the continual professional development of our coaching staff. Through a gift made by an International Restorative Justice expert and other current funders, the PSC will be participating in multiple SEL and Restorative Practices conferences and site visits over the next five months.

Current Partner Schools

In summer 2022, school leaders participated in a planning meeting with the PSC's Director and new Associate Director. In August 2022, each school had their full culture teams attend the PSC's first in-person institute since 2019. We have had several schools that the PSC did not ask to return for the SY22-23 school year, as a result of school community involvement, and/or leadership transitions. We also added several new partner schools. The PSC is currently partnering with 23 schools:

- Abbottston Elementary School
- Augusta Fells Savage Institute of Visual Arts +
- The Belair-Edison School - Brehms Campus
- The Belair-Edison School - Brendan Campus
- Booker T. Washington Middle School ^{PH}
- Creative City Public Charter
- Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary School ^{PH}
- Furman L. Templeton Preparatory Academy ^{PH}
- George Washington Elementary School +
- Glenmount Elementary/Middle School
- Gwynns Falls Elementary School
- Harlem Park Elementary/Middle School ^{PH}
- The Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School +
- Holabird Academy
- Johnston Square Elementary School
- Joseph C. Briscoe Academy +
- Leith Walk Elementary/Middle School
- Matthew A. Henson Elementary School +
- Renaissance Academy ^{PH}
- Roland Park Elementary/Middle School
- Tunbridge Public Charter School
- Westport Academy +
- Wolfe Street Academy +

+ The PSC and Promise Heights is the Lead Agency for Community Schools for 13 schools. In these schools, the PSC employs a community school coordinator, who is a full-time licensed social worker responsible for engaging communities and building support systems for students, families, staff, and the community.