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# Discipline Policy Recommendations

## Introduction

The following recommendations came from a group of 30 teachers, parents and students who gathered to discuss and articulate their recommendations. There was a very clear consensus around the necessity for creating structures that support relationship building and Restorative Practices.

## Belief Statement

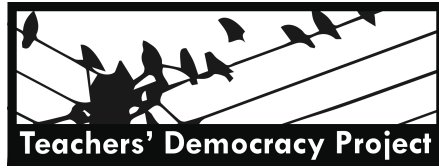
The purpose of the discipline policy is to specify how Baltimore City Schools prioritizes relationship building over traditional forms of discipline as a way to foster student growth and development.

Adults in schools play a primary part in whether students feel safe, calm and ready to participate productively in a classroom. Teachers and administrators should believe and understand that culture matters. They must learn how to communicate effectively across cultural divides. To do this requires a deep sense of humility, vulnerability and compassion for young people and seeing making mistakes and/or poor choices as an inevitable/necessary means for growth. They also need to model respect to students, their families and community members in order to expect respect in return. School staff members are the visitors to the community and school walls do not change this fact. Teachers and other staff members need more time with their students apart from instruction to understand where the student is coming from.

When conflict occurs children are able to figure out their own problems when asked the right questions in a neutral manner and with an assumption of good intent and a willingness to grow. Change takes time, and the thrust of all discipline should be toward the long term building of relationships, and not primarily or exclusively toward short term punishment.

## Specific changes to the policy

1. All schools should engage in schoolwide restorative practices so that all relationships are, to the greatest extent possible, horizontal.
2. The transition to RP will require extensive professional development. This PD needs to include, but is not limited to: child psychology and cognitive development, teacher student communication, restorative circles, community conferencing, how to deal with youth and their opinions, mindfulness, and trauma informed care.



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3. Provide guidelines regarding having private conversations to diffuse situations in the hallway.
4. All new teachers need a mentor who truly understands how to build relationships with students and their families. These mentors can be people from the community. This could also involve a Buddy System such as PGCo.
5. Student mentoring programs should also be available in all schools such as a big sister little sister program, upperclassman help underclassmen to provide a strong framework based on prevention.
6. School administrators will be held accountable for full implementation of RP as part of their evaluations. This means ensuring that discipline issues are facilitated by someone who can maintain neutrality. Students should have a say in who gets to handle their situation. Parents must be included to the greatest extent possible. There should be space set aside for conversations and someone available at all times to make this a priority.
7. The facilitator should give students a chance to explain themselves, understanding that people only act out because they are hurting and not getting their needs met. Disruption is a cry for help. Punishment does not help in the long run.
8. No suspensions should be administered without a conversation with a parent to establish whether it is a viable option.
9. Administrators will also be held accountable for teacher stability.
10. Time and adequate personnel to implement schoolwide RP must be included in the school schedule and budget. This should include at least 30 minutes for daily circles, and time for restorative circles as needed. There should be a dedicated staff member for every 300 students whose responsibility is to establish RP across the school and bring together the necessary parties for voluntary restorative circles.
11. Two days should be set aside at the start of school to allow for: relationship building to happen between teachers, students and their families; asking parents about what they want for their child and setting out a plan for how to achieve these goals. This effort should be supplemented by send-home surveys and in-school time to allow teachers to learn about what motivates a student, his or her learning style, emotional triggers, and what they are good at.
12. Have a written form of the policy, which is given to all schools. This could be a new version of the Code of Conduct.