



For Immediate Release

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Murphy Administration Announces Grant to Encourage Restorative Justice Programs in Schools

TRENTON, NJ – In an initiative designed to promote equity and innovative approaches toward school discipline, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) today announced a grant to encourage restorative justice programs in schools.

Legislation enacted last year called on the NJDOE to establish a three-year “Restorative Justice in Education Pilot Program,” which will be funded with a \$500,000 annual allocation.

Research has shown that out-of-school suspensions are correlated with reduced academic performance, a reduced likelihood of college attendance, and an increased probability of arrest. Moreover, out-of-school suspensions disproportionately impact students of color. In response, many educators are exploring restorative practices, which are dispute-resolution programs designed to allow all parties of a dispute to be involved in defining the harm and devising remedies. Restorative justice aims to provide a more supportive and inclusive school culture through practices such as student or community court, restorative circles, conferencing, and mediation.

“Rethinking student discipline is long overdue,” said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education. “Restorative justice is a promising strategy that gives schools another tool for responding to student infractions. This program aims to not only encourage restorative practices in schools, but to also emphasize the professional development needed to effectively implement these new strategies.”

According to data collected by the NJDOE, New Jersey students lost 168,509 school days in the 2018-2019 school year due to out-of-school suspensions – amounting to an annual loss of instruction of more than 930 *school years*. The suspension rate for Black students was three times that of their white counterparts.

The Restorative Justice in Education Pilot Program is designed to provide an alternative to student suspension that offers educators additional flexibility and a new lens through which to view student discipline. For instance, while some infractions might justify a student suspension, a more minor incident might have the student who committed the infraction meet with those who were harmed in a structured environment with trained adult.

The NJDOE will select an organization to receive a grant to provide schools with the training and resources necessary to participate in the three-year pilot program. Eligible organizations have until March 11, 2021 to apply for the grant. The Acting Commissioner will then select 15 schools, by way of a separate application process, to receive training and resources from the selected organization. The restorative practices would be

implemented in the 2021-2022 school year. At the end of the program, the Commissioner will prepare a report for the Governor on the implementation of the program, including recommendations on the feasibility of expanding it to other school districts.

The Restorative Justice in Education Pilot Program is one part of an overarching strategy to support positive school communities in New Jersey. Additionally, the NJDOE provides additional resources for schools that promote social and emotional learning ([SEL](#)), help schools implement a multi-tiered system for positive behavior support ([PBSIS](#)), and, through a partnership with the state Attorney General’s Office, support a “[Handle with Care](#)” program to better serve students experiencing trauma.

The Restorative Justice in Education Pilot Program grant can be viewed on the NJDOE’s [Grant Opportunities](#) webpage.

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