

Statement to H. 675

Sparks, Director of Equity and Safe/Inclusive Schools for the Burlington School District

April 17, 2018

The Burlington School District is addressing inappropriate student behavior in a more proactive manner through Restorative Practices as a way to keep students in school, in class and engaged in learning. We have continued to look at our district's data, and we are taking necessary steps to address all disparities including race, ethnicity, gender, family income level, sexual orientation, immigration status, or disability status that may impede on a student's access to education. We are seeing the impact of our work with more engaged students and teachers.

While we understand there are cases where students must be separated from the building, a student should never be completely separated from their education. Burlington School District is also identifying ways to eliminate practices that exclude student voices and authentic student participation in decision making. We are looking to eliminate practices that cause students to become disengaged.

In a district our size, BSD has spent \$35,000 for teacher training, materials, and that was not enough. For this to be districtwide and systemic, we have to provide ongoing training for teachers, changing our curriculum, creating support materials, rewriting procedures and policies. Due to current cuts, we do not have enough resources. This is a significant dilemma.

The state-mandated Bullying, Hazing, and Harassment policies without support, training, and therefore the BHH policies have not been implemented statewide with fidelity. I would like us not to do that again with Restorative Practices.

I don't believe RP should be mandated. The state should not force districts to implement RP without any foundational support or training of administrators and teachers. The worst thing the state could do would be to force or mandate that schools to adopt policies to implement RP without appropriate training, support or buy-in from all faculty and staff. One of our greatest challenges in Burlington was getting critical buy-in. We also needed to assure faculty and staff that RP is not another initiative or program that would be gone in a year.

Furthermore, the state should consider a process to evaluate the implementation of RP to ensure it is accomplishing its intended goals.

The state may want to consider incentivizing RP – reward districts that are doing it with financial support, ongoing training opportunities, consistent materials, access to consultants, and training at the state level with qualified practitioners.

Understanding that RP is not a magic cure, it is definitely one approach along with other systems schools are currently using, such as PBIS, Second Step, Responsive Classroom.