

## TOOL: Create a High School Peace Room

This tool describes how Peace Rooms can be used in secondary school settings and ways to include students in the process of creating one. In this tool you will find:

1. [Examples of how Peace Rooms are used in secondary schools](#)
2. [Two strategies for including students in the process of creating and using a Peace Room](#)

### What is a Peace Room?

A Peace Room is a dedicated, safe, and neutral space in a school building for students to work through difficult emotions and challenging situations with the help of a restorative practice practitioner, mental health professional, teacher, or mentor. The purpose of this space is to:

- Allow a student to self-manage when experiencing intense emotions, process their emotions, refocus, and return to class.
- Hold individual or group stress management, mindfulness, reflection, and healing activities for students and staff.
- De-escalate and diffuse conflicts and challenging behaviors by giving a student space to “cool down” before talking through a problem.
- Implement responsive restorative practices (e.g. restorative conferences, peace circles, peer juries) by helping students understand the impact when there has been a conflict or wrongdoing, and move toward problem-solving, repairing harm, and restoration of relationships and community.

### Examples of How Peace Rooms are used in Secondary Schools

The following pages describe some of the ways high schools are using Peace Rooms to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of their students. Through creative partnerships and collaboration, these schools are using dedicated and repurposed space for a variety of programming, including restorative practices, de-escalation and self-management, wellness and mindfulness activities, mental health and trauma-based services, and community gathering spaces.

## Baltimore City Schools

As part of Baltimore City Public Schools' (City Schools) comprehensive SEL strategy, the district introduced Wholeness Rooms at 20 SEL Intensive Learning Sites during SY2018-19 and launched an additional 21 wholeness rooms during the 2019-2020 school year. These 41 wholeness rooms—modeled after the Planning Centers of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District—are dedicated spaces in schools for students to use when they need time to reflect, calm down, and receive support. The rooms are staffed by Wholeness Specialists who are trained by district-approved partners to implement the wholeness program in their schools. The Wholeness Specialists manage the space and support students' social and emotional development by facilitating activities that allow students to learn developmentally appropriate skills (e.g., empathy, self-efficacy, problem-solving skills) and engage in exploration activities necessary for career and life-long success.



## Chicago Public Schools



Many high schools throughout Chicago Public Schools use Peace Rooms as a hub for restorative practices and interventions including restorative conversations, peace circles, and re-entry circles (i.e., circles for students returning from a suspension). Using a discipline referral process, staff members refer a student to the Peace Room for classroom disruptions, negative interactions, or physical or verbal altercations. Additionally, students may elect to go to the Peace Room for a variety of reasons, including to process grief over the loss of a family member; seek support on how to navigate difficult relationships with peers, teachers, or family members; or discuss personal problems. Increasingly, schools are seeing the value in and

using Peace Rooms for trauma-informed practices, including individual and group therapy or mindfulness activities such as yoga, drumming, and meditation. A number of schools partner with community organizations like Alternatives, Inc. and Umoja Student Development Corp to develop these spaces, provide trained staff, and support students and school staff to understand and use the space as intended. To learn more about how these spaces are staffed and structured, how they are used, and outcomes for students and schools, click on the links below:

- [One Student's Restorative Justice Journey in the Sullivan High School Peace Room](#)
- [Peace Room Trumps Suspensions at Lincoln Park High School](#)
- [Students Find Peace at Manley High School](#)

## Eastside High School, Paterson, N.J.

When Eastside High School opened its [Peace Center](#) in October 2019, it was one of the Paterson Public School District's most apparent demonstrations of how it had embraced restorative justice practices. With the help of Eastside's Principal of Operations Gerald E. Glisson, Ed.D. the Peace Center was poised to be an alternative for students who needed to serve out-of-school suspensions as well as a place for counseling for students experiencing a crisis and a respite for students seeking a break. The space was refurbished with comfortable sofas and pillows, warm lighting, and hand-painted murals with the help of Youth Consultation Services (YCS), a nonprofit organization that provides social services for Eastside students.

A great advantage of the Peace Center is that students do not fall behind in school. "The Peace Center gives suspended students, or any students needing help, a place to go where learning can continue," said Superintendent Eileen Shafer.

The most unexpected use of the Peace Center came just after it opened. When a fight broke out during a football game between rival teams, they didn't expect to end up at the Peace Center, embracing each other as friends instead of enemies. Glisson, a former corrections officer who played college football, spoke to both teams during the session. "Your opponent is just like you – hungry and determined," Glisson said as the players sat in a circle. "Most of all, opponents are to be respected because the player who is your opponent today could be your teammate tomorrow, whether it is in a different league or in college."



Photo credit: Paterson Public Schools

The Peace Center has been quiet since school buildings have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, Glisson passed away on May 3, 2020 after testing positive for the virus. The Paterson Board of Education has since named the Peace Center after Glisson.

## Century High School, Hillsboro School District, Ore.

The Wellness Center (see [this video](#)) helps students at Century High School who are feeling agitated, stressed, or have difficulty maintaining focus. Students use the center for approximately 15 minutes at a time to help self-regulate and learn how their bodies and minds work, using tools for relaxation and focus. The space has specially designed stations for motor activities (e.g., climbing wall, yoga, ping pong, balance balls), sensory activities using putty and sand, and a dark space for deep breathing exercises and meditation. The Wellness Center empowers students by helping them build resilience and coping skills and increase their readiness to learn.

## Strategies to Include Students in the Process of Creating and Using a Peace Room

When a Peace Room and the procedures surrounding its use are designed by students, it will serve its purpose as a place where SEL takes place—where students go voluntarily to process emotions, communicate, and solve problems. When students are left out of the design process, the risk is that Peace Rooms will be seen as a place of escape, exclusion, or punishment. Consider the two approaches below as ways of including student input to provide the right framing and tone for your Peace Room.

### Student-led Project to Design, Fund, and Approve a Peace Room

**Goal:** After discussing issues of space, safety, and self-management with the help of a teacher or faculty sponsor, students will work together to transform a space (e.g., empty classroom, conference room) into one that promotes peace within their school.

1. Staff member gathers students from a class, club or team, student leadership group, or special committee in a circle to discuss the following questions:
  - What do you think of when you hear the term “Peace Room”?
  - If we had a space designated to be a Peace Room in our school, when/how do you think students could use it? (if useful, share some examples of how Peace Rooms are defined and used in other high schools)
  - Do you think it is possible to have a space like that in our school? Why or why not?
  - Who would benefit from this space within our school?
  - What activities should occur in this space?
  - What would you want this space to look like? Feel like?
  - How could this space help students? Teachers?
  - Logistically, what is needed to make a Peace Room a reality at our school?
    - What unused/underused space could be transformed?
    - What materials are needed for the transformation?
    - How can it be arranged for an adult to be present and facilitate activities in the space?
    - What kind of procedures would need to be put in place to make sure the space is used as intended?
  - As a group, are we interested in taking this on as a project?
  - What is one thing you would like to do personally to help create a Peace Room in our school?
2. Students design a survey for the student body about what they would like to see in a Peace Room, and what they would need there to feel physically and emotionally safe and calm.
3. Based on results of the survey, students come up with a list of the necessary resources (e.g., materials, supplies, training, staff) they would need for the space as well as ideas for how faculty can support and staff the space.
4. Students develop a budget and identify possible funders or partner organizations that could help fund or provide needed supplies and resources for the space.
5. Students present a proposal to the principal or leadership team for their space.

Additional Resources:

[Creating Space for Peace](#) (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago)

[Creating Restorative Justice Spaces in Schools](#) (Designing Justice + Designing Spaces)

## Activity to Gather Student Input on the Use of the Peace Room

**Goal:** To brainstorm possible uses of the Peace Room and how it should be accessed.

- **Gather students in a circle.** Acknowledge to your students that there are times during the school day when they may be experiencing strong emotions that make it difficult to focus on learning. It is natural to feel frustrated, angry, anxious, or overwhelmed at times.

Explain that the Peace Room is available to students as a place they can go to in order to:

- Calm down and relieve stress
  - Seek a moment of peace and solitude
  - Work through a situation or problem with peers
  - Resolve a conflict they had with a classmate or teacher
- Using discussion rounds or a partner activity, ask students to reflect and respond to the following questions:
    - *What are some times when you have had strong emotions in school?*
    - *How do you know when these emotions are building up inside? What happens in your body when you have these emotions?*
    - *What do you need to feel calm or refocus?*
    - *How might going to the Peace Room help?*
    - *What are situations in which you or a classmate might need to leave class to use the Peace Room?*
  - Explain that when going to the Peace Room, students will still be expected to follow [schoolwide norms](#). Let students know that in order for the Peace Room to work, they need to make sure they use the room in a way that is productive and responsible.
  - Using another set of discussion rounds or partner activity, ask students to reflect and respond to the following questions:
    - *What procedures do we need to put into place for using the Peace Room?*
    - *How would you know that it's time to use the Peace Room, and what is the best/most respectful way to communicate this to a teacher?*
    - *What are some situations when a teacher might recommend to a student that they use the Peace Room? What is the best/most respectful way to say this to a student?*
    - *How do we make sure that when someone goes to the Peace Room, they do so in a way that isn't distracting to other students?*
    - *How do we make sure that all students have a fair chance to use the Peace Room?*
    - *How do we make sure that students and staff don't misuse the Peace Room?*
  - Bring the class back in a circle every few months. Ask students:
    - *Has anyone used the Peace Room?*
    - *Was it helpful? How?*
    - *Are there any activities that you participated in that you think could help others?*
    - *What did you learn about yourself?*
    - *Were you able to use any of the skills that we learned in class such as: reflection, self-management, "I statements," active listening, or problem solving?*