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NEW RESTORATIVE JUSTICE “PEACE CENTER” OPENS AT
EASTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

New center is an alternative to suspensions, a haven for students who need a break

***Photo Attached: see caption at the end of the release***

PATERNSON – Paterson Public Schools officials gathered with community organization leaders and city officials on Friday for the opening of Eastside High School’s new “Peace Center.” The new facility serves as an alternative for students who need to serve out of school suspensions. It is also provides a respite for students seeking a break from school day pressures or experiencing a crisis.

“Suspended students who are forbidden from coming to school and left to sit at home have no way to improve themselves. They can’t learn. They can’t develop coping to avoid the behaviors that get them suspended in the first place,” said Superintendent of Schools Eileen Shafer. “The Peace Center gives suspended students, or any students needing help, a place to go where learning can continue – especially students learning about themselves. I want to thank Principal Gerald Glisson and his staff, as well as EHS Academy Principals Vivian Gains, Miguel Sosa, and Edgard Nieves for being committed to restorative justice. I also want to acknowledge our partners at the Paterson Education Fund and Youth Consultation Services for all they have done to bring restorative justice practices to the district and help launch this fantastic new Peace Center.”

Restorative justice is a practice that encourages students to resolve conflicts on their own and in small groups. Often, students receive out-of-school suspensions for fighting. The Peace Center gives students who would otherwise be prohibited from coming to Eastside High School for a number of days a chance to keep up with their schoolwork while working to change behaviors that have previously escalated into fighting.
“This is what is needed in the district. Our kids suffer enough. They have enough negativity around them. It’s time for something positive to be put in place for them,” said Linda Reid of the Paterson Education Fund (PEF), who attended the center’s opening ribbon cutting on Friday.

The Paterson Education Fund sponsored a group of Paterson Public Schools educators to receive restorative justice training last December.

“How they have people who can support them, talk to them about their problems and their issues and help them to work it out,” Reid said.

The Peace Center is located in a temporary classroom unit on the Eastside High School campus. It has been refurbished with the help of Youth Consultation Services (YCS), a nonprofit organization that provides social services for EHS students. The YCS team furnished the center with comfortable sofas, warm lighting, an aromatic diffuser, a water sculpture, hand-painted murals and pillows with comforting messages.

“We look forward to utilizing the space for individual and group counseling sessions when it is available,” said YCS Director Edna Angelos. “It is the perfect environment to help a child de-stress.”

Among the dignitaries who attended the opening of the Peace Center were Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh and Councilwoman Dr. Lilisa Mimms.

Photo Caption: Giovanna Rodriguez, a teacher coordinator who was trained in restorative justice in December, moderates a discussion among students at Eastside High School’s new Peace Center.

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