



Clark Hill PLC takes steps to support community through restorative justice

Strong cities come from strong communities.

Clark Hill PLC is doing its part to make and keep the Grand Rapids-area community strong by helping implement the recently passed legislation mandating consideration of restorative justice in schools in a common-sense way that realizes the intent of the legislation without adding to the burden that school administrators already shoulder.

Restorative justice is a move away from the “zero tolerance” policies in schools that can lead to severe results

in the suspension and expulsion of students. For example, in some well-reported cases, schools have felt that they had no choice but to expel students who may have unintentionally brought contraband items to school or engaged in behavior that merited a less severe consequence. Legislation aimed at reforming these practices had bi-partisan support, as well as support from organizations that support public schools in their mission. While the legislation took effect Aug. 1, 2017, Clark Hill has worked for months to help schools prepare for the changes mandated by the

restorative justice processes.

“Restorative justice is a philosophy and disciplinary practice defining and enacting accountability instead of punishment,” said Joe Urban, an attorney at Clark Hill who has been working on this issue. “It brings together those who cause harm with those they’ve hurt in facilitated interventions designed to acknowledge the harm and identify the appropriate actions to make things as right as possible.”

The practice is a development tool for addressing conflict and misconduct by fostering empathy, personal responsibility and community building.

Urban and others from Clark Hill teamed up with Nancy Schertzing, president of Schertzing Communications and a restorative justice trainer, and have hosted training sessions for the community to prepare for the changes and to remedy pitfalls.

“Our training course, ‘Restorative Justice: Reshaping School Discipline,’ explores the impact of restorative justice legislation on traditional school discipline,” said Kara Rozin, an education attorney in Clark Hill’s Grand Rapids office. “We prepare participants for the upcoming changes in the law and help revise school policies and procedures, while Nancy provides practical tools for restorative justice to bring back to the districts.”

The hope is the principles of restorative justice will create safer, more unified learning communities, which will not only impact students and the schools, but the community at large.



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