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December 3, 2009

Mr. Arne Duncan
U.S. Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Re: National Resolution for Ending School Pushout Signed by 200 Organizations and Individuals from Across the United States

Dear Secretary Duncan:

We are pleased to announce the release of the *National Resolution for Ending School Pushout*, a call to action for our school systems to end the harsh discipline and law enforcement tactics that push too many young people out of school each year. The National Resolution calls for schools to implement positive alternatives that protect the human rights of young people and keep students in school.

The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) is a coalition of advocates, organizers, youth, parents, and educators, united to present human rights solutions to school pushout. The DSC's members and supporters drafted this National Resolution. Over 200 organizations and individuals have signed on to support it.

School pushout is the result of policies and practices that disengage students from learning and remove them from instruction, including disciplinary practices such as suspensions, expulsions, and school arrests. The overuse of these practices is reaching crisis level in our nation's schools. Our current disciplinary rates are the highest in the nation's history, and have more than doubled over the past three decades. Historically disenfranchised youth, including students of color, students with disabilities, and students in poor communities, are impacted the most by these policies.

While none question the need to keep schools safe, there is reason to question the efficacy of these exclusionary discipline practices. According to the American Psychological Association, the use of these practices do not improve behavior, but can instead increase the likelihood that students will fall behind academically, have future behavior problems, become withdrawn and dropout of school. The use of these practices affects not only the student being disciplined, but the health and success of the school as a whole: schools with high suspension rates score lower on state accountability tests, even when adjusting for demographic differences.

The National Resolution details efforts that our schools, districts, and states can take to end school pushout. Research shows that schools using proactive, positive approaches to discipline have been able to reduce suspensions and expulsions while improving student achievement and perceptions of school safety. Across the country, the National Resolution's signatories are raising awareness about school pushout and ways to counter it in their schools and communities.

There are several steps that Congress and the Department of Education can take to reduce school pushout and improve our schools for all children:

1. Prioritize school climate-improvement in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: help Congress identify clear steps schools and districts can take to improve school climate; require low performing schools and districts with high disciplinary rates to implement approaches to improve school climate; track disciplinary rates for all students and require districts to reduce any disproportionality in the use of exclusionary discipline by race, poverty, English proficiency, and special educational status;
2. Adopt the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights' proposed 2009-2010 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) to collect broader, more relevant disciplinary data (suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, school-based arrests, instances of corporal punishment, expulsions under zero-tolerance policies, etc.), and expand the CRDC to survey all schools, including charters and juvenile residential facilities, on an annual basis;
3. Prioritize efforts to improve school climate in future guidance on American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds and in future budgets;
4. Support the Positive Behavior for Safe and Effective Schools Act (H.R. 2597) to provide federal funding and assistance for school and district efforts to reduce the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices and improve school climate through implementing School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) and other proven methods; and
5. Support the Youth PROMISE Act (S.435/H.R. 1064) to provide for evidence-based and promising practices for the prevention of juvenile delinquency and gang activity to ensure that youth lead productive, safe, healthy, gang-free, and law-abiding lives.

Please help our schools and students by supporting these efforts both in Congress and in your community.

Sincerely,

The Dignity in Schools Campaign Core Group

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