Dignity in Schools Campaign
National Resolution for Ending School Pushout

Millions of children and youth are denied educational opportunities in the United States. This injustice results from systemic inequality and a lack of public commitment to doing what is necessary to keep all young people in school. Every year, too many students are pushed out of school by degrading environments and harsh disciplinary measures that undermine their learning.

Members and supporters of the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) drafted this Resolution to reframe the debate about school climate and discipline from one that favors the punishment and exclusion of children to one based on human rights. The DSC is a national coalition of advocates, organizers, youth, parents, and educators. The Resolution has two goals. It confronts the many factors that contribute to pushing youth out of schools, such as harmful disciplinary practices, inadequate curriculum, and lack of parent and family participation in decision-making. It also provides targeted recommendations to promote positive school climates and alternative approaches to discipline as essential elements for ending this crisis in our schools.

We, the undersigned, call upon federal, state, and local education agencies to challenge the present conditions that lead to many thousands of students being pushed out of school, and to promote positive learning environments and discipline policies to ensure that each student completes his or her education.

I. The School Pushout Problem

A. School pushout occurs from kindergarten through high school and results from numerous factors that prevent or discourage young people from remaining on track to complete their education, including: unwelcoming school environments and low expectations for students; lack of adequate resources and overcrowded schools; lack of parent, student, family, and community participation in school decision-making; over-reliance on zero-tolerance practices and punitive measures such as suspensions and expulsions; violations of due process rights, the ceding of disciplinary authority to law enforcement or security personnel, and over-reliance on law enforcement tactics to control school discipline; use of corporal punishment in schools; overemphasis on high stakes testing; poor or limited teacher training and support; inadequate curricula that fail to meet individual or special education needs; little or no academic mentoring and support for students; lack of effective and equitable college preparatory and career counseling services; a failure to make relevant student data accessible and available to the public; and a history of systemic racism and inequality.

B. These factors impact all students, but disproportionately impact historically disenfranchised youth, including: students of color; students from low-income families; students with developmental, physical, and mental disabilities; students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered; English language learners; immigrant and undocumented youth; homeless youth; children and youth in state or foster care; pregnant and parenting teens; and students in the juvenile justice system and alternative education settings.

C. Pushout has severe and lasting consequences for students, parents, schools, and communities. Students experience diminished academic opportunities and social alienation. They are pushed into substandard alternative schools and GED programs, are less likely to earn standard high school diplomas, and are less likely to enter and succeed in institutions of higher learning. Students have an increased risk of involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system and face long-term diminished future job opportunities. Parents experience significant emotional stress, social isolation, and financial burdens, including job loss when they miss work. Schools suffer as ineffective and harmful policies become institutionalized and teachers feel alienated and mistreated, resulting in high absence and turnover rates. Communities suffer as young people are further disenfranchised and cycles of poverty, segregation, and crime are perpetuated.

II. Positive Approaches to School Climate and Discipline: Essential Elements to Ending Pushout

Fundamental human rights principles, recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, offer a framework that shifts our approach to education and school discipline in the United States. In accordance with these principles, we demand that:

1. Education and discipline policies be aimed at the full development of the child, ensuring that:

- School staff actively builds positive school cultures that support students' social and academic development, and recognizes that students are still maturing and developing.
- Schools adopt evidence-based discipline policies and practices, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices.
- Schools minimize suspensions, expulsions, and other exclusionary discipline policies.
- Schools adopt targeted practices and programs to identify and meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of disenfranchised students and students at risk of being pushed out.
- Schools collaborate with other systems - including child welfare and juvenile courts – to support a strong academic continuum and system of behavior support for each student.
- Staff is well-trained in positive approaches to discipline and is held accountable for discipline practices and policies through state and federal legislation, and through transparent data collection and reporting on disaggregated suspension, expulsion, and removal rates, and dropout data that captures all students who leave school.
- In combination with these positive approaches to discipline and in order to engage students and create positive environments for learning, schools:
    - Adopt teaching methods and practices that take into account the academic level of each student and ensure academic continuity from grade to grade.
    - Utilize curricula that are challenging, engaging, and creative, that recognize students' different learning styles and deemphasize or eliminate high stakes testing.
    - Make sure that educators, staff, and administrators reinforce high expectations for all students and make college preparatory and vocational activities available to establish a culture of youth prepared for lifelong learning.

- All schools receive equitable funding from federal, state, and local governments enabling them to provide adequate resources and quality services, including positive discipline practices, for all students.

2. Human dignity is protected in schools, ensuring that:

- School-wide initiatives teach and convey a clear message to students and school staff of respect for all cultures and learning styles, and an expectation for all students and staff to promote human dignity and cultural sensitivity in all interactions with others.
- Overly aggressive law enforcement tactics, corporal punishment, the use of Tasers, and other degrading practices are eliminated and school safety personnel are required to complete mandatory training on positive support and discipline of children, the unique needs of students with disabilities, students' rights, and cultural sensitivity.
- Educators and staff familiar with child development supervise safety personnel in schools. Law enforcement personnel must not bear responsibility for enforcing school discipline. Safety personnel should be included in all events and training related to building positive school environments.

3. Students will not experience discrimination of any kind, ensuring that:

- School staff challenges and eliminates negative and biased perceptions of students and parents.
- School staff develops and implements plans to reduce and eliminate the higher numbers of suspensions and expulsions targeted at students of color and other disenfranchised students; doing so will ensure more equitable consequences for all students.

4. The right to participation of students and parents will be respected and upheld, ensuring that:

- School staff encourages and promotes more frequent and meaningful parent and student participation in the development and implementation of school discipline policies and practices, through proactive and timely communication using friendly and accessible language.
- Educators receive training and support to interact positively and build relationships with students and parents, and partnerships with communities.
- School and district staff recognize and protect due process rights for students in school discipline cases.

To create a fundamental cultural shift in schools and authentically change school climate and discipline practices, we must elect and hold accountable leaders who support our vision for dignity in schools, and bring key stakeholders together to achieve support for this vision.

For more information about the Dignity in Schools Campaign, school pushout, and human rights visit www.dignityinschools.org

Signatures

International
International Institute for Restorative Practices
International Indian Tribal Council

National
Advancement Project
American Civil Liberties Union
American Orthopsychiatric Association
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First Peoples Human Rights Organization
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