

## DENVER, COLORADO – PADRES Y JOVENES UNIDOS

Since 2003, Padres y Jovenes Unidos have led a campaign to change disciplinary policies and practices within Denver Public Schools (DPS), and have successfully created new policies and programs that have become national models. The project began when parents and students noticed a disturbing trend within the school system – students were being pushed out of schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems for minor acts of misconduct. Padres y Jovenes began to organize students and parents to change DPS school discipline policies, and started working with Advancement Project on an investigation of the problem. That research, much of which was compiled by students, resulted in a 2005 report called *Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track* which exposed dramatic racial disparities in discipline and the excessive use of suspensions, expulsions, police tickets, and arrests of DPS students. The report became an organizing tool for students, who were able to recruit support by exposing the severity of the problem.

The students then presented their findings to the School Board, the teachers' union, the Chief of Police, the City Council, and the candidates for Superintendent, and they demanded change. One of their demands was to implement restorative justice programs in middle and high schools throughout the District, as an alternative to “zero tolerance.” Padres y Jovenes and Advancement Project worked with DPS to secure funding for the program, and thus far, 17 schools have implemented restorative justice programs. This program has been a huge success for the district, as the use of suspensions in these schools has dropped dramatically, while student behavior and satisfaction with the disciplinary process have both improved considerably.

Padres y Jovenes Unidos also demanded that DPS change its discipline policies to eliminate the unnecessary suspension, expulsion, and ticketing of students. The Superintendent agreed, and in March 2006, Padres y Jovenes and Advancement Project began working with DPS officials, teachers, parents, and community members on revising the district's discipline policy. The revised policies were implemented at the beginning of the 2008-09 school year, and include the following changes:

- School officials are directed to deal with minor acts of misconduct within the school setting. The emphasis is on keeping students within the learning environment and limiting the time spent outside of class.
- Out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the police are only available for the most serious misconduct, and their use for even those offenses is discouraged.
- There is a renewed emphasis on graduated discipline, in which the consequences for misbehavior start at a low level and only reach higher levels if the behavior is repeated.
- Schools are required to work to eliminate racial disparities in discipline, and must continuously monitor and assess their school discipline practices through data collection and other means. They are also encouraged to form committees comprised of school personnel, parents, and students – which would develop, monitor, and evaluate school discipline practices.
- The policies clarify and expand parents' and students' due process rights, such as:

- The right to be notified of disciplinary actions;
- The right to be heard throughout the disciplinary process;
- The right to have representation at hearings;
- The right to appeal.
- The circumstances under which students can be suspended for conduct off school grounds were substantially limited.
- During an out-of-school suspension, schools must now give students the opportunity to complete their class work without penalty.
- The policies require extensive reporting of school discipline data by both individual schools and the district.

The new policies represent major victories for the students and parents of Denver, and place Denver at the forefront of school discipline reform efforts nationwide. Indeed, the policies are already serving as models for school districts and community organizations around the country. .

Even before full implementation of these policies, the work of Padres y Jovenes and Advancement Project has led to a remarkable 68% reduction in police tickets within DPS, and a 40% reduction in the use of out-of-school suspensions. They are now devoting themselves to ensuring full implementation of the policies through a districtwide monitoring effort.

Resources:

New DPS discipline policies (*hyperlink to* <http://ed.dpsk12.org:8080/policy/FMPro?-db=policy.fp3&-format=detail.html&-lay=html&-sortfield=File&-op=eq&Category=Students&-recid=32967&-find=>)

Discipline Policies attachments (*hyperlink to*

[http://webdata.dpsk12.org/policy/pdf/Policy\\_JK-R\\_Attachment\\_A.pdf](http://webdata.dpsk12.org/policy/pdf/Policy_JK-R_Attachment_A.pdf)  
[http://webdata.dpsk12.org/policy/pdf/Policy\\_JK-R\\_Attachment\\_B.pdf](http://webdata.dpsk12.org/policy/pdf/Policy_JK-R_Attachment_B.pdf)  
[http://webdata.dpsk12.org/policy/pdf/Policy\\_JK-R\\_Attachment\\_C.pdf](http://webdata.dpsk12.org/policy/pdf/Policy_JK-R_Attachment_C.pdf)

Education on Lockdown,

<http://www.advancementproject.org/reports/FINALEOLrep.pdf>

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