

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY NEWS

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MEDIA ADVISORY

WEEKEND CONFERENCE CHALLENGES ZERO-TOLERANCE APPROACH

CHICAGO, Ill. --- A conference taking place at Northwestern University School of Law this weekend brings together experts, parents, students and advocates from throughout the country to work toward a national resolution to reframe the national dialogue on the educational climate and school discipline.

Drafters of the resolution are hoping to benefit from the momentum of the Obama Administration's investment in public education.

The resolution will urge rethinking of "zero-tolerance" disciplinary measures and other school policies that, conference organizers argue, disproportionately harm children of color and those who are poor and have special needs.

Co-sponsored by Northwestern Law's Children and Family Justice Center (CFJC), the conference will take place from 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Friday, June 5, and from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, June 6, at the School of Law, Thorne Auditorium, 375 E. Chicago Ave.

"After the Columbine High School killings, schools and police have claimed that expelling and arresting students make schools safer, but the response has contributed to school policies that deprive children of an education and our common future," said Bernardine Dohrn, CFJC director.

Over the last decade, schools have heavily used the zero-tolerance approach to suspend and expel children from school, sometimes for minor offenses such as being in possession of their own vitamins and prescription medications.

The American Psychological Association and others have failed to find any evidence that the use of zero tolerance, suspension and expulsion leads to improvements in student behavior or school climate, according to conference organizers.

A National Resolution on Ending School Pushout also will encourage programs and polices to assist children with disabilities and English-language learners who are not getting the help needed to succeed in school.

Besides the Children and Family Justice Center, the conference is sponsored by the Dignity in Schools Campaign, a coalition of more than 40 individuals, the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) Racial Justice Program, the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, Southern Poverty Law Center, Advancement Project, DLA Piper LLP, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, National Education Association, ACLU of Illinois, CADRE, Public Counsel, Children's Rights Litigation Committee of the Section of Litigation of the American Bar Association (ABA) and the ABA Youth at Risk Commission, with special thanks to the Ford Foundation.

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